



European Foundation for the
Improvement of Living and
Working Conditions



Food and beverage sector: 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 food and beverage service activities sector (NACE 56).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 1,349 workers in the food and beverage sector. The report compares aspects of work in the sector with the EU28 as a whole.

Structural characteristics

In 2010, 7,275,400 European workers worked in the food and beverage sector, comprising 3.3% of the EU28 workforce (3.2% in 2008 and 3.4% in 2012). Employment in the sector slightly increased by 2.7% between 2008 and 2010, and increased slightly again by 1.4% between 2010 and 2012 (Eurostat, 2013).

Countries where the food and beverage sector is a relatively large employer are Spain (5.7%), Greece (5.5%), Portugal (4.7%) and Cyprus (4.5%). The sector has relatively little prominence in Romania (1.5%), Poland (1.6%), Luxembourg (1.8%) and Estonia (2.2%).

A large proportion of workers in the food and beverage sector (61%) work in micro-workplaces (1–9 employees), compared to 42% of workers in the EU28. Consequently, the percentage of workers in the food and beverage sector in small and medium-sized (SMEs, 10–249 employees, 38%) and large (250+ employees, 0.6%) workplaces is smaller than in the EU28 (46% and 12% respectively).² The sector employs slightly more women (53%) than men (47%), and it employs a relatively large proportion of young people: 22% of workers in the sector are under 25 years of age, compared to 9% in the EU28. Relatively many workers in the sector are self-employed with employees (10%) compared to the EU28 as a whole (4%). However, relatively few workers in the sector are self-employed without employees (6%) compared to the EU28 as a whole (11%). Fixed-term contracts and workers without a formal contract are much more prevalent in the food and beverage sector than in the EU28 as a whole (Figure 1).

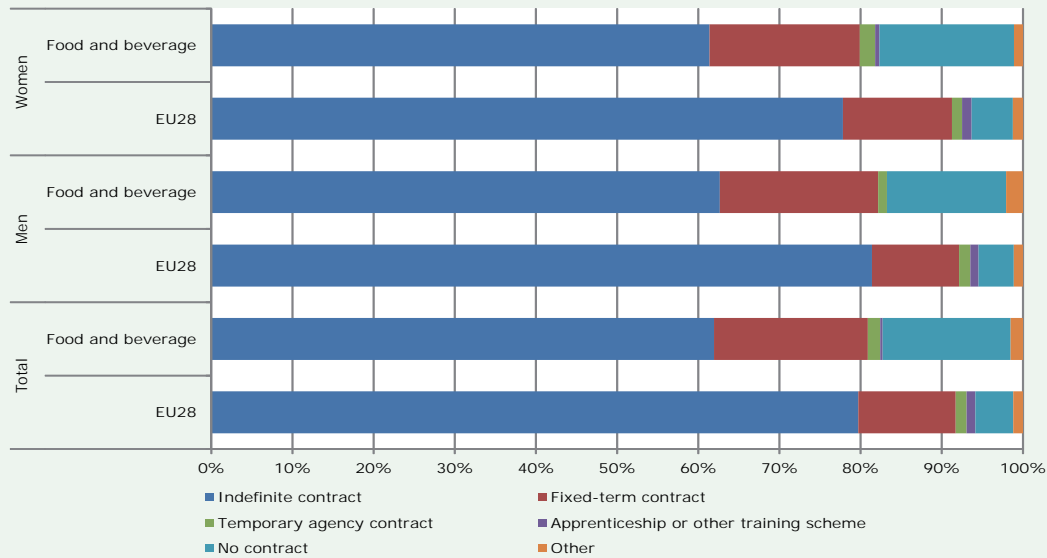
Food and beverage sector in a nutshell

- Many workers express a preference for working more hours than currently
- Fixed-term workers and workers without a formal contract are very prevalent
- Working atypical hours is very common
- Employer-paid training is much less common than in the EU28 as a whole
- The sector scores very low on indicators measuring quality of working time and job prospects

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

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

Figure 1: Employment status, by gender



Part-time work is more prevalent in the food and beverage sector than in the EU28, particularly among women, with 47% of women and 27% 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 working hours in the food and beverage sector are more changeable than in the EU28 as a whole: the sector has higher proportions of workers reporting a decrease as well as higher proportions of workers reporting an increase in the number of hours worked than the EU28 as a whole.

Both in the food and beverage sector and in the EU28 in general, workers more frequently reported changes in salary or income than changes in hours worked in the year prior to the survey. The proportion of employees in the sector reporting an increase in salary is similar to the EU28 as a whole. As in the EU28, workers in the food and beverage sector in micro-workplaces more frequently reported wage cuts than those in small and medium-sized workplaces.

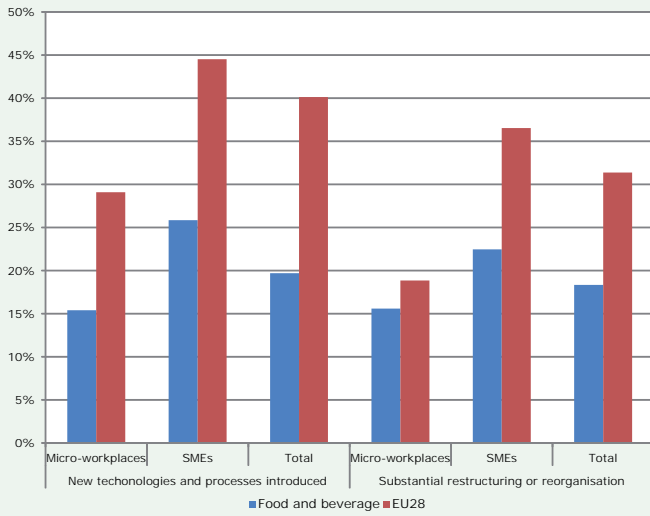
Workers in the food and beverage sector much less frequently reported restructuring and the introduction of new technologies than the EU28 average (Figure 3). The sector follows the same pattern as the EU28: the share of employees reporting restructuring

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



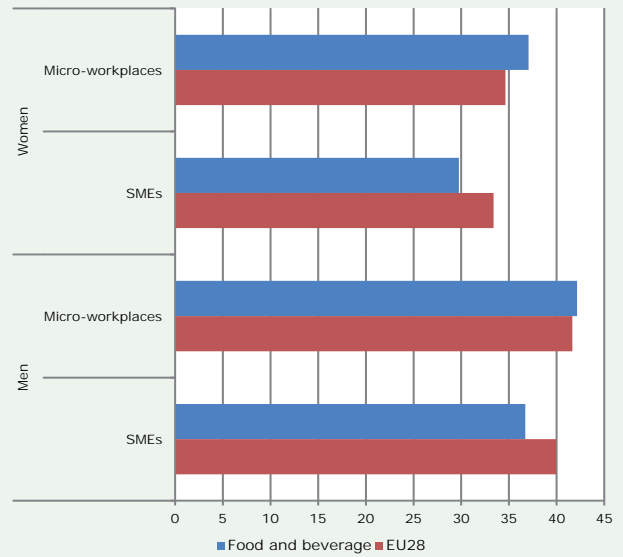
or reorganisation or the introduction of new production processes and technologies increases with workplace size, but the sector shows lower levels of reported changes across all workplace sizes.

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



the food and beverage sector, however, both men and women in micro-workplaces work more hours than those in larger workplaces.

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



Working time and work-life balance

Workers in the food and beverage sector on average work 37 hours per week compared to 38 hours in the EU28. As in the EU28, men in the sector tend to work more hours than women, regardless of workplace size (Figure 4). In the EU28, working time does not vary significantly between different-sized workplaces. In

Workers in the food and beverage sector are less often satisfied with the number of hours they are currently working (46%) than workers in the EU28 as a whole (55%; Figure 5). The difference is mainly due to the proportion of workers in the sector preferring to work more hours than currently – and this difference is much more pronounced for women than for men.

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

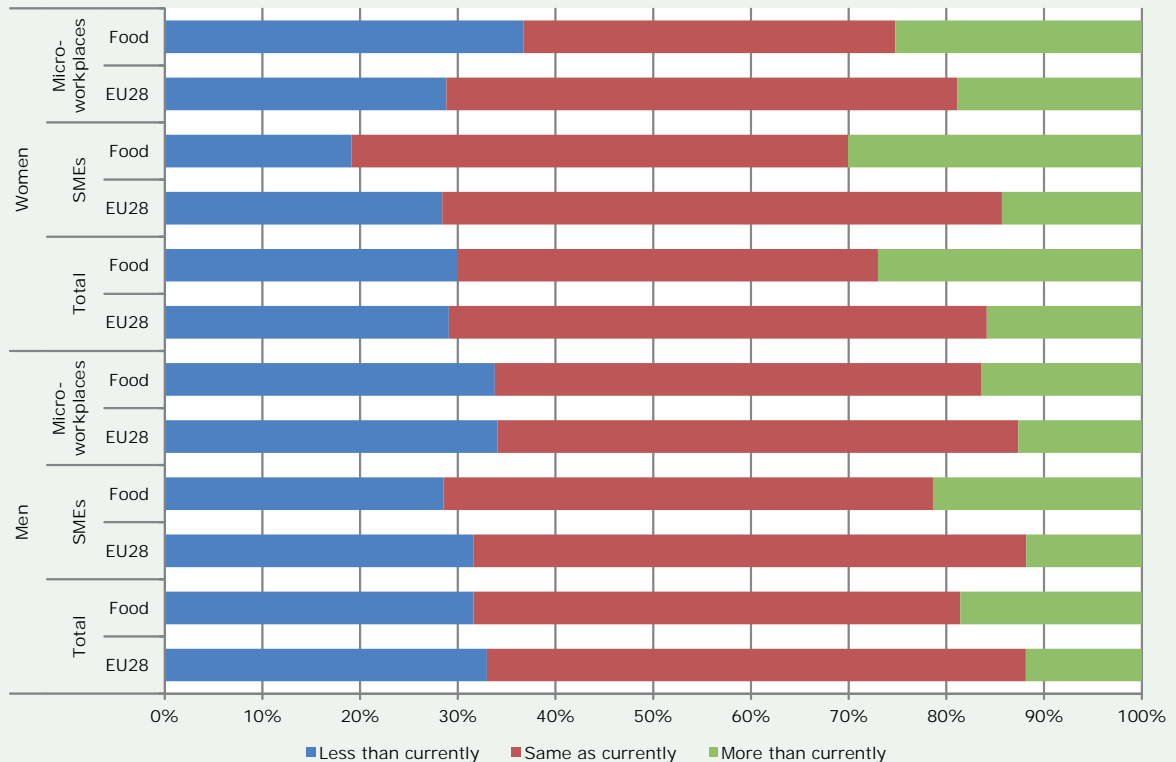
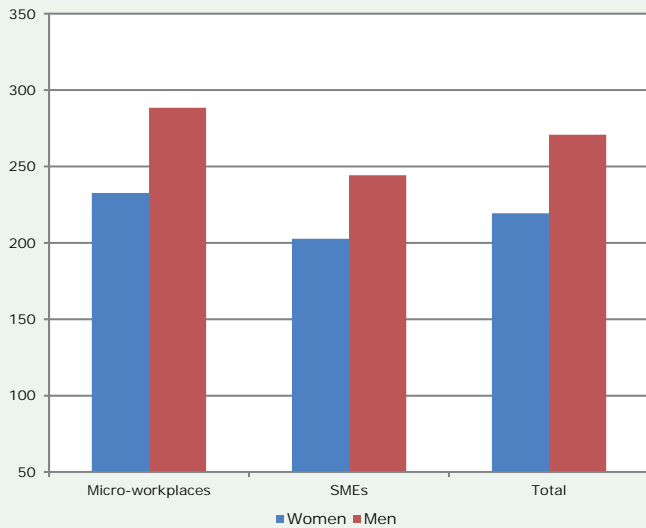


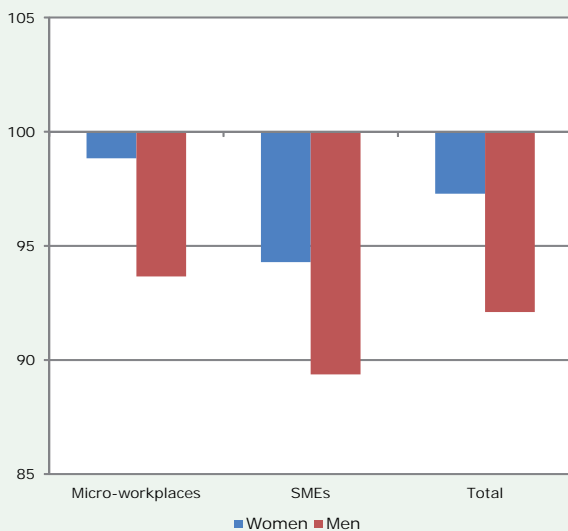
Figure 6 shows that working atypical hours (weekends, evenings and/or nights) is more than twice as prevalent for women and almost three times as prevalent for men in the sector compared to women and men in the EU28 as a whole. These differences are even more pronounced among workers in micro-workplaces.

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



When looking at the regularity of working time, differences between the sector and the EU28 are much smaller (Figure 7).

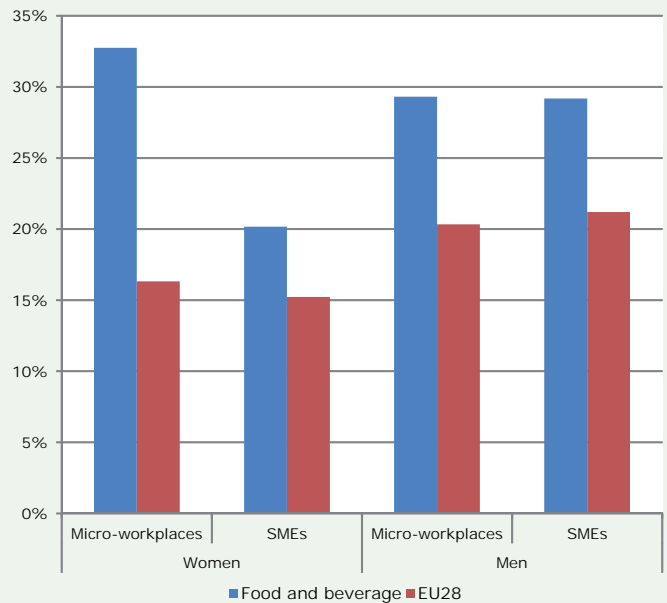
Figure 7: Index of regularity of working time (EU28=100), by gender and workplace size



Workers in the food and beverage sector tend to have less regular hours (working the same number of hours every day and the same number of days every week) than the EU28 average worker. Men in the sector tend to have less regularity of working hours than women. Interestingly, although working hours in micro-workplaces tend to be more atypical than in SMEs in the sector, they also tend to be more regular.

Given the much higher prevalence of atypical hours and the lower prevalence of regular hours in the sector, it is not surprising that figure 8 shows that workers in the food and beverage sector are much more likely to report a poor work-life balance (the fit between working hours and family or social commitments) than workers in the EU28 as a whole. For men, this difference is the same in micro-workplaces and SMEs; the difference is much larger for women working in micro-workplaces than for women working in SMEs.

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



In the food and beverage sector, unlike in the EU28 as a whole, women in micro-workplaces report the poorest work-life balance.

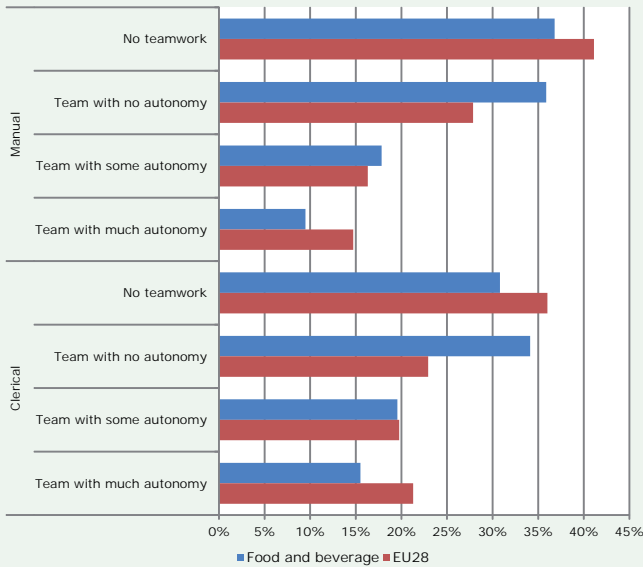
Work organisation

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 more prevalent in the food and beverage sector (63%) than in the EU28 (59%, Figure 9). However, a large proportion of workers in the sector work in teams with no autonomy. The proportions of both manual and clerical worker workers in the sector reporting that they work in teams with much autonomy are much smaller than in the EU28 as a whole.

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 sector working in a task rotation system is higher than in the EU28 (Figure 10). This difference is found in micro-workplaces and SMEs for all types of task rotation, except for autonomous multiskilling, which is slightly more prevalent in micro-workplaces in the food and beverage sector than in micro-workplaces in the EU28 as a whole and slightly less prevalent in SMEs in the sector than in SMEs in the EU28 as a whole.

Female bosses

The proportion of workers in the food and beverage sector reporting they have a female boss (25%) falls well short of the proportion of female workers in the sector (53%). Interestingly, although women in the sector much less often report having a female boss (30%) than women in the EU28 as a whole (47%), men in the sector (18%) are more likely to have a female boss than their EU28 counterparts (12%).

Skills and training

Overall, the majority of workers in the sector say that their present skills correspond well with their duties (Figure 11). In food and beverages, workers are slightly more likely to report being 'over-skilled' than in the EU28, and less likely to report being 'under-skilled'. The pattern is more or less the same across the different age groups.

Figure 10: Prevalence of task rotation, by workplace size

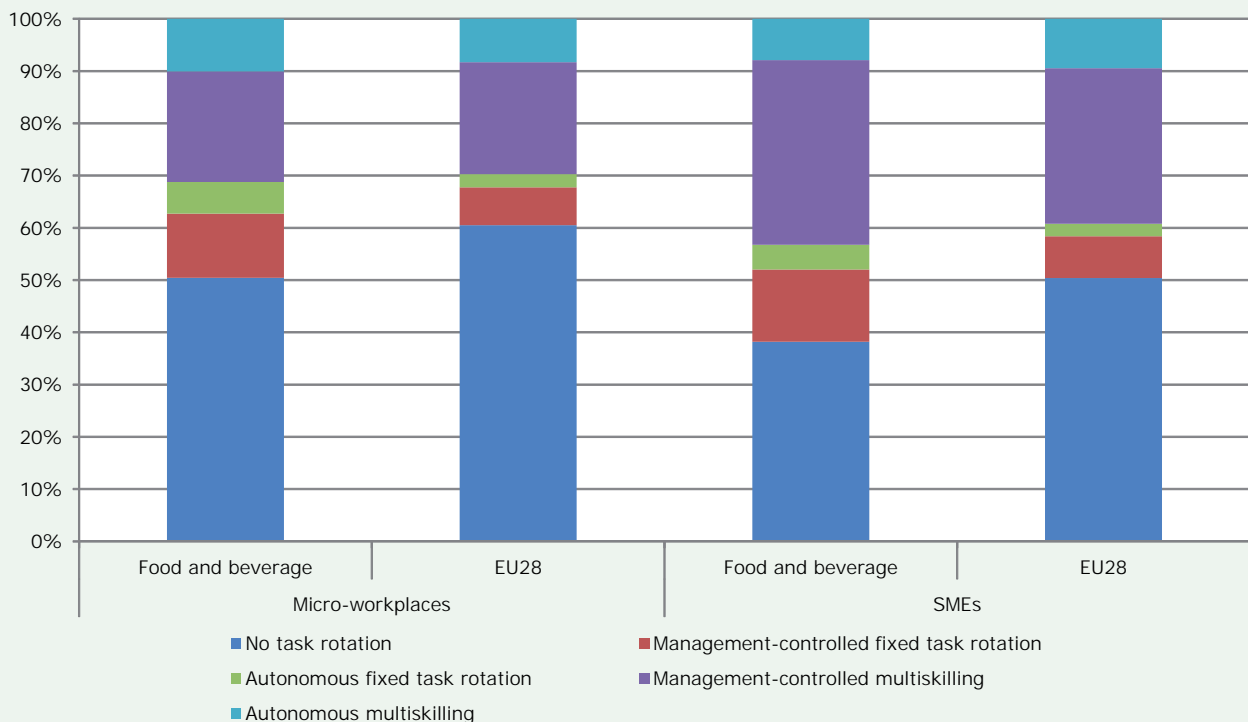
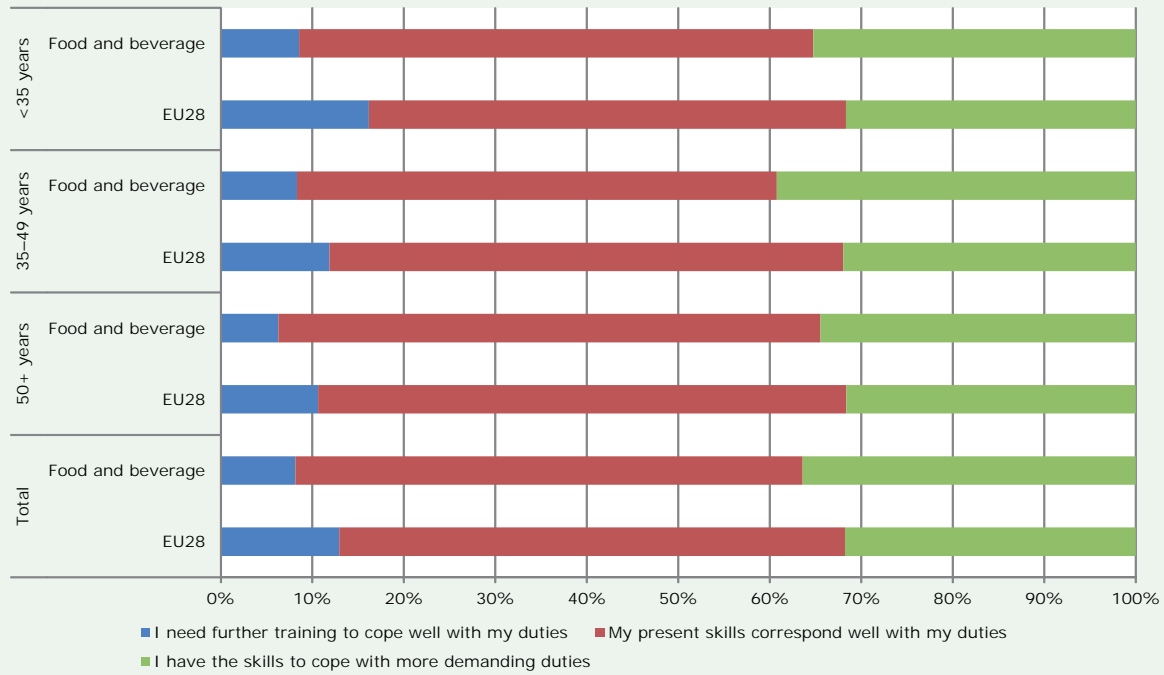
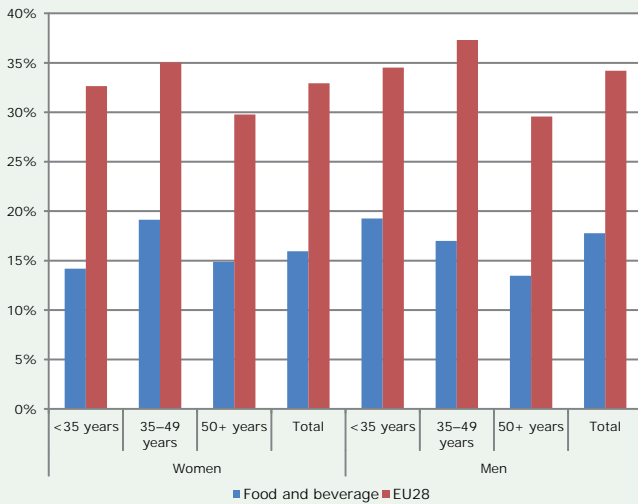


Figure 11: Match between skills and tasks, by age



The percentage of workers in the food and beverage sector reporting they have received training paid for by their employer during the year before the survey is much lower than in the EU28 for both women and men (Figure 12). In some categories, the proportion of workers that received training is only half that of the EU28 average.

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

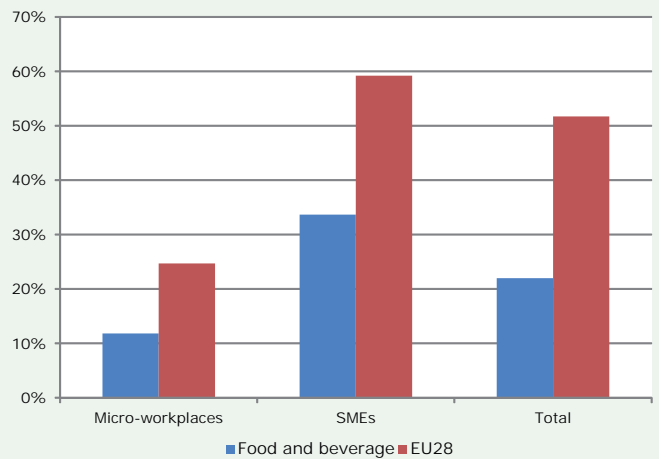


Employee representation

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

In 2010, 22% of employees in the food and beverage sector reported that an employee representative was available compared to 52% of workers in the EU28. A similarly large relative difference is found in both workplace sizes.

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



Psychosocial and physical environment

Job autonomy and work intensity

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

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

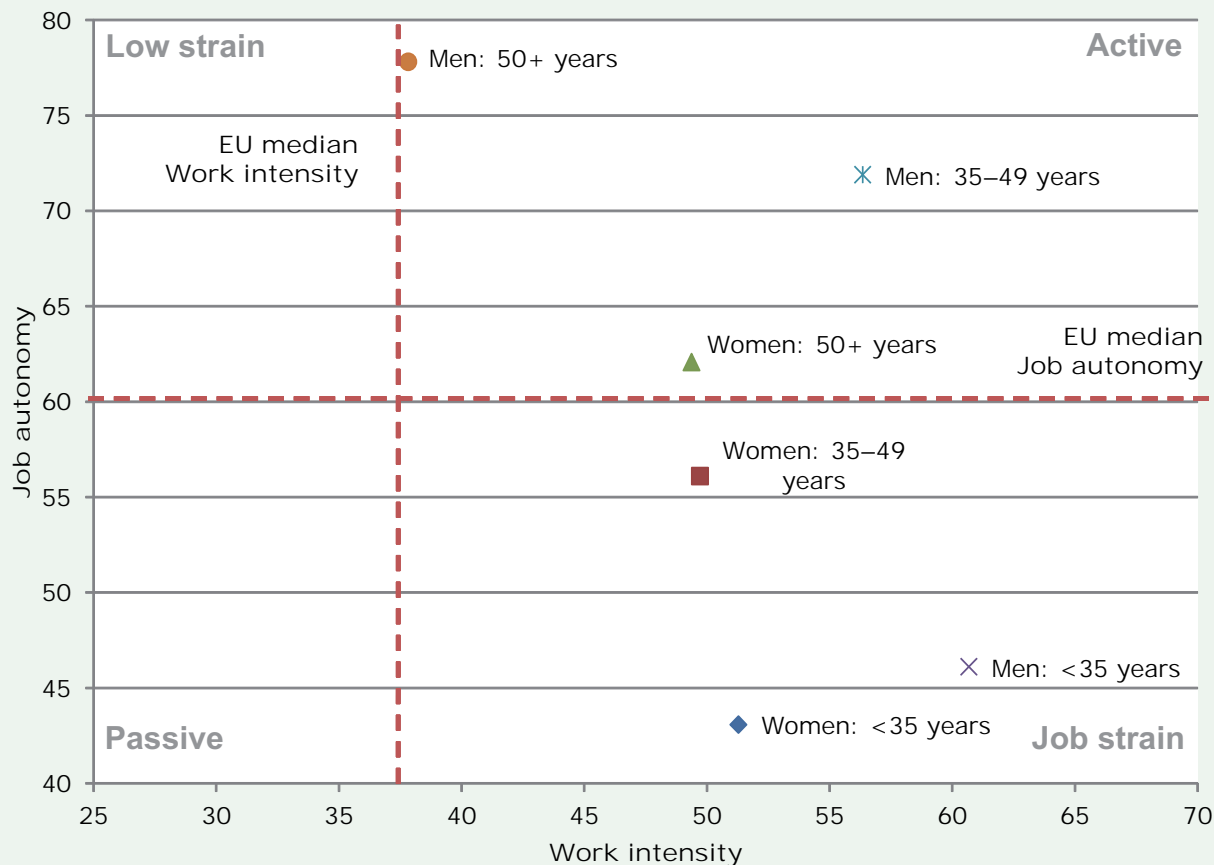


Figure 14 shows the likelihood of workers in the food and beverage sector suffering from work-related stress. Groups of workers are plotted along two axes: job autonomy and work intensity.

In the food and beverage sector, both the top-left and bottom-left quadrants of Figure 14 are empty. Workers in the bottom-left quadrant are likely to be in so-called ‘passive’ jobs, characterised by low levels of intensity and low levels of autonomy. The risk of stress is low in these jobs, but there are risks of frustration and low motivation as the jobs are not very challenging and workers have little control over what they do in their job and how they do it. Jobs of workers in the top-left or ‘low strain’ quadrant are characterised by low levels of work intensity and high levels of job autonomy. Again, 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.

The top-right quadrant contains the averages for men and women over 50, and for men between 35 and 49 years old in the sector. These workers tend to be in

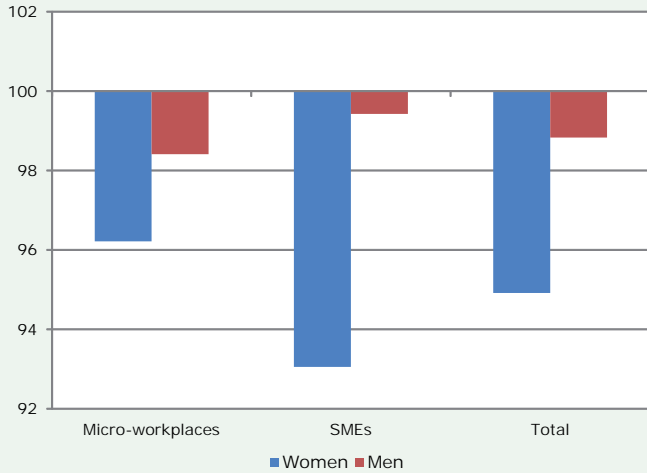
‘active’ jobs with high levels of work intensity and high levels of job autonomy. Although their jobs can be very demanding, they have enough control over the way they do their job and can develop coping strategies through active learning.

Finally, the most problematic category is ‘job strain’ in the bottom-right quadrant, which contains the averages for women under 35, women from 35 to 49 years old and men under 35. Their jobs are characterised by high levels of intensity and low levels of autonomy, posing the risk of unhealthy stress levels 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.

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



The differences between the food and beverage sector and the EU28 average are relatively small (Figure 15). Women in the sector tend to have slightly lower social environment scores than men in both workplace size categories, with women working in SMEs scoring considerably below the EU28 average.

Physical risks

Exposure to posture- and movement-related risks is most prevalent in the food and beverage sector, followed by ambient risks. Reported levels of exposure to biological and chemical risks in the sector are well below the EU28 average (Figure 16).

Women in both manual and clerical occupations report above-average levels of exposure to posture- and movement-related risks, while only men in clerical jobs also report above-average levels of exposure to these risks. On the other hand, men in manual jobs report higher level of exposure to ambient risks.

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

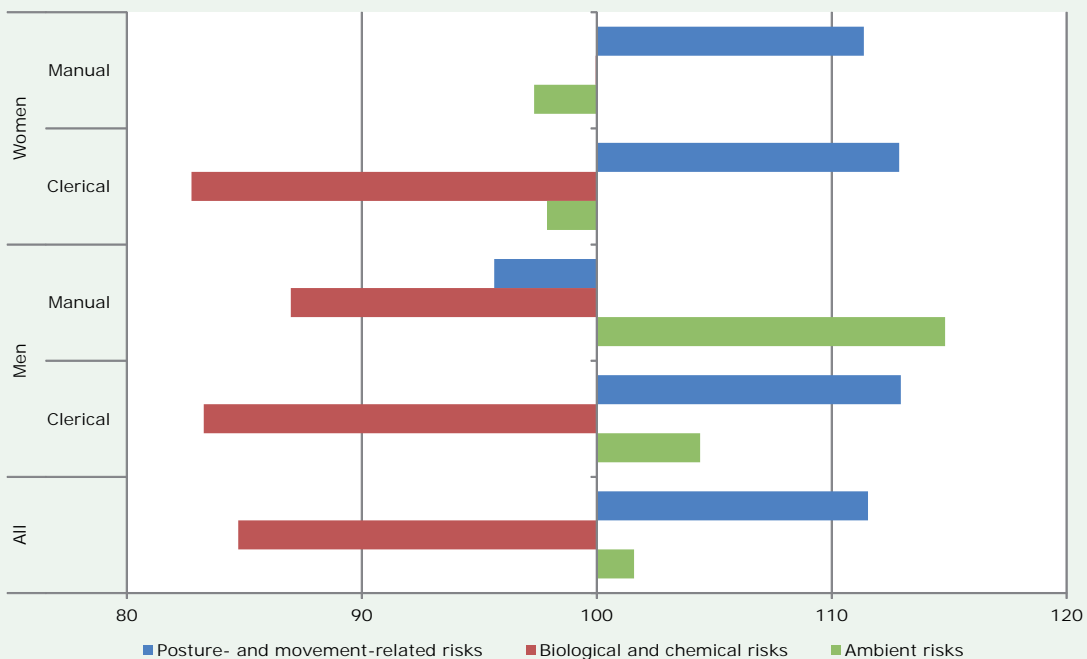
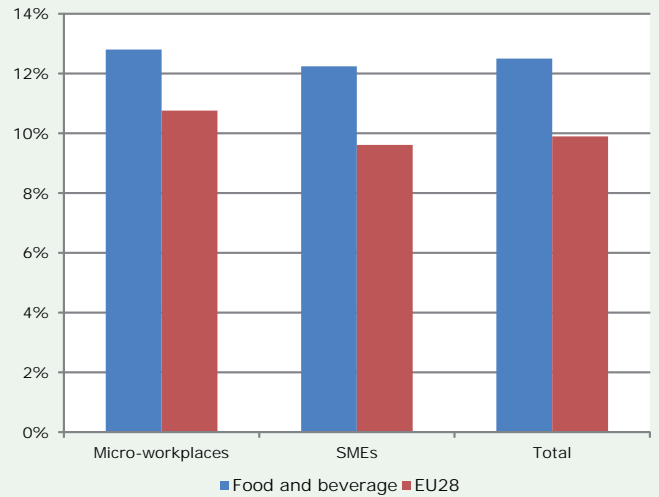


Figure 17: Not very well or not at all well informed about health and safety risks at work, by workplace size



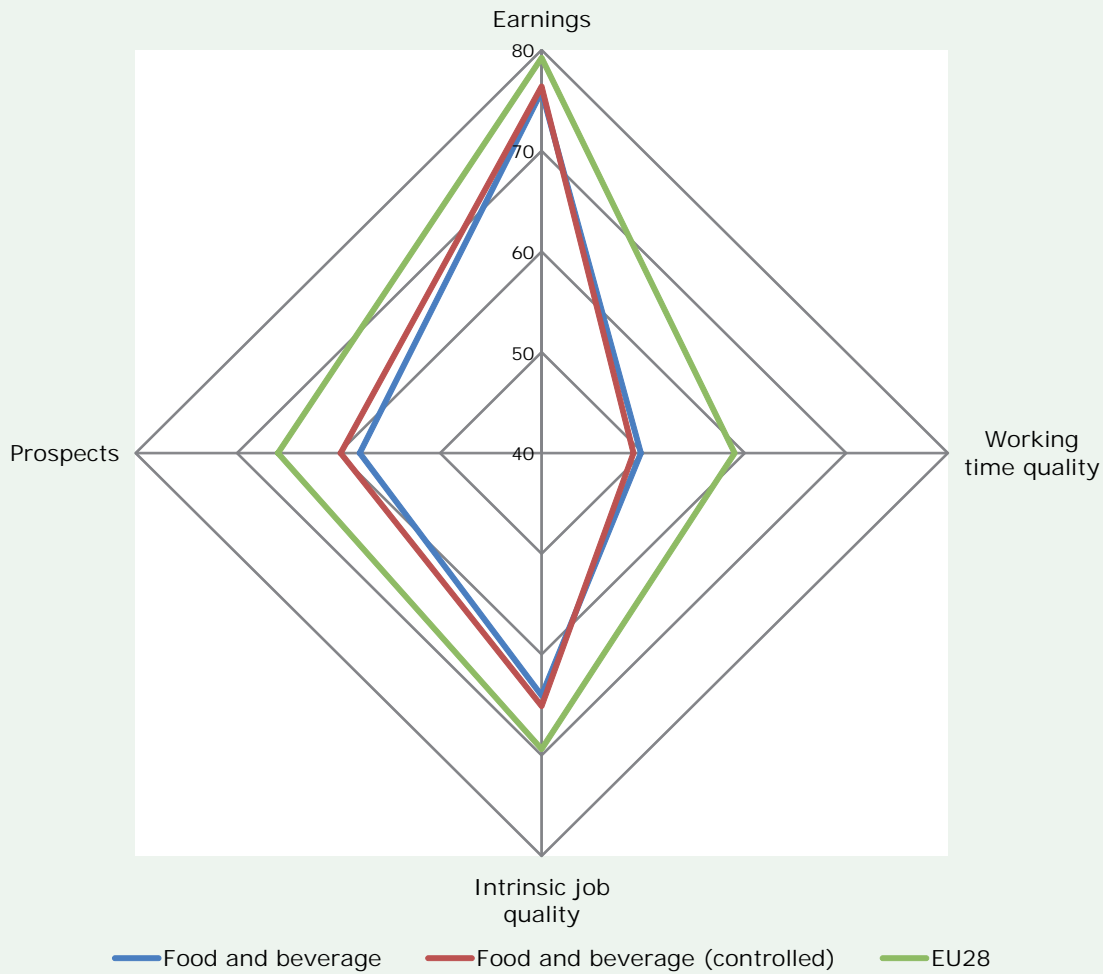
12% workers in the food and beverage sector report they were not very well or not at all well informed about workplace risks, which is a little bit above the EU28 average (10%; Figure 17). Micro-workplaces do not differ from SMEs in this regard.

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 food and beverage sector. It shows the average score for the sector on each of the indicators, with and without

Figure 18: Job quality in the food and beverage sector compared with the EU28



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

controlling for the structural characteristics of the sector's workers (age, gender, workplace size, education level and country), and for the EU28.

Job quality in the food and beverage sector is lower than the EU28 average on all indicators. The largest differences are observed for working time quality and prospects. The differences between the EU28 average and the sector scores are still significant after controlling for structural factors of the sector's workforce such as gender, age, education, establishment size and country distribution.

Health and sustainability of work

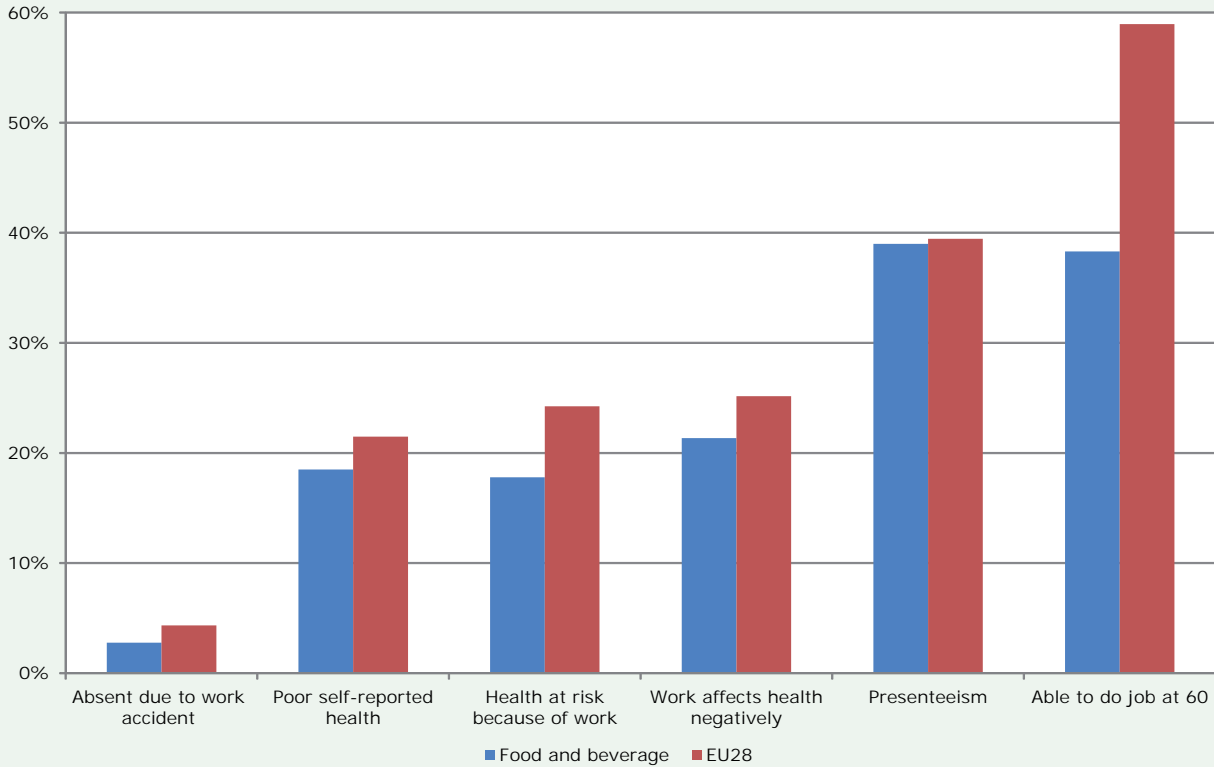
Working conditions can impact both positively and negatively on the health of workers and on the sustainability of their jobs.

Figure 19 shows that the food and beverage sector compares fairly favourably with the EU28, with lower proportions of workers reporting having been absent due to a work accident, reporting poor self-reported health, reporting that their health is at risk because of work and that work affects their health negatively. The

sector does not differ much from the EU28 average for workers reporting having worked when sick (presenteeism). However, the proportion of workers saying they will be able to do their job at the age of 60 is considerably lower than in the EU28.

As in the previous section, multivariate analyses were carried out to check whether differences between the subsectors and the EU28 change when controlling for structural background characteristics (age, gender, workplace size, education level and country). This analysis showed some interesting results. The favourable differences for absenteeism due to work accidents, reported health risk because of work and perceived negative effect of work on health remain. However, when controlling for the background characteristics of the workers, it is found that workers in the food and beverage sector are more – rather than less – likely to report poor health. The reversal of the effect is mainly due to the fact that workers in the sector are relatively young, resulting in a relatively low average score. When comparing them to workers of a similar age, however, it found that they are more likely to report poor health. The difference between

Figure 19: Health and sustainability of work



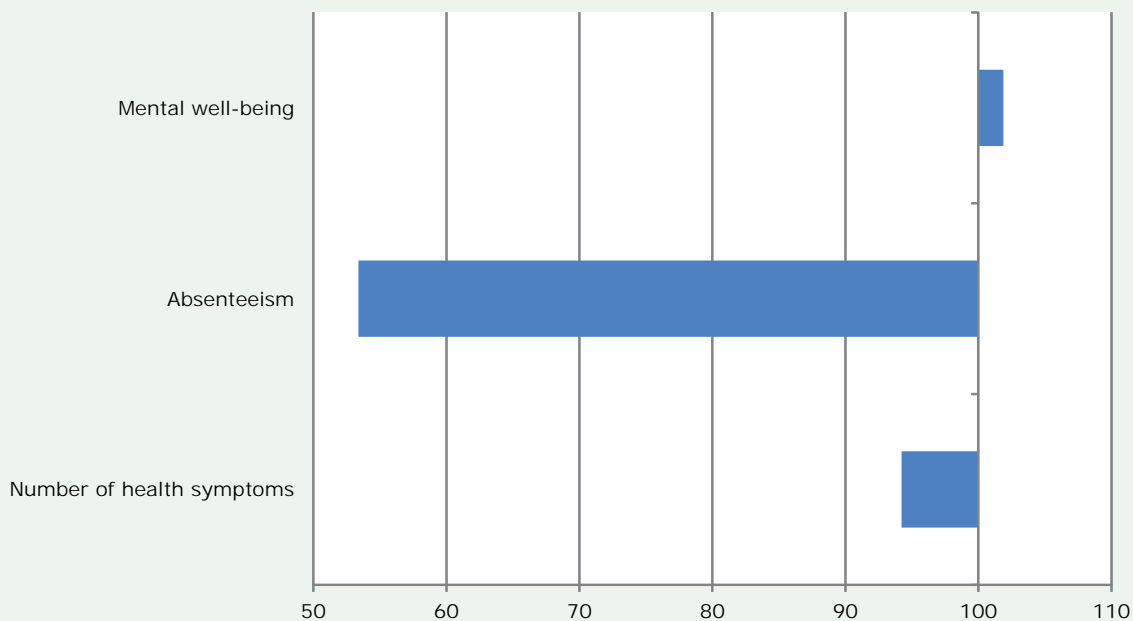
the sector and the EU28 in terms of workers reporting that they will be able to do their job at 60 decreases but remains significant after controlling for gender, age, education, workplace size and country.

Figure 20 shows that mental well-being scores in the food and beverage sector are close to the EU28 average, that the number of health problems is slightly lower and that absenteeism is considerably lower.

After controlling for gender, age, education, establishment size and country distribution,

differences in number of health symptoms are no longer statistically significant, but the differences in levels of absenteeism remain. It is important to keep in mind that the impact of work on health is a very gradual process that can take a long time and cannot be fully captured in a cross-sectional survey. The results in this section are likely to underestimate the often negative health effects that physically and psychologically strenuous working conditions can have.

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



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European Working Conditions Survey

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

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

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

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

Sectoral analysis

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

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

Further information

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