

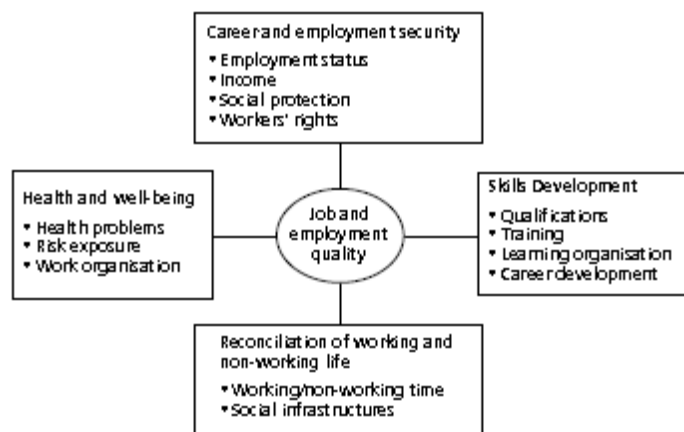
Job quality : an operationalisation based on the European Working Conditions survey series (the 'EWCS')¹

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Introduction

The European foundation for the improvement of working and living conditions (**Eurofound**) was established in 1975 with a view to contribute to the better planning of working (and living) conditions in Europe. It is governed by a tripartite governing board with representatives of employers organisations, trade unions and governments coming from all member states. Its annual budget is in the order of 20,5 million euros.

Eurofound has been working for many years on **quality of work and employment** and has developed a framework in 2001² which identifies 4 main dimensions of quality of work and employment which have been written in a worker perspective and identifies a number of relevant levels for behaviours, levels, actions, policies which will affect levels of job quality.



This framework has guided the development of a series of Eurofound research projects such as the European Working Conditions Observatory, EWCO, company case studies as well as the European working conditions survey;

¹ Paper prepared for the LFS conference on methodology in Gdansk on 23 / 24 May 2013. This paper is the responsibility of the authors and may not reflect the official views of Eurofound.

² Quality of work and employment in Europe: Issues and challenges, (2002), Foundation paper No.1, <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2002/12/en/1/ef0212en.pdf>

Eurofound has been monitoring since 1991, working conditions in Europe through the **European Working Conditions Survey (the EWCS)**. The first EWCS survey started in 1991, and has been repeated every 5 years since 1995. Since the first edition, the country coverage of the survey as well as its topical topic has increased. EWCS is being developed and revised with the support of a wide range of experts as well as tripartite Eurofound stakeholders. It has an explicit commitment towards gender mainstreaming.

The last edition carried in 2010 covered 34 countries (EU 27, Norway, Croatia, FYROM, Macedonia, Montenegro, Turkey, Albania and Kosovo). In total, 43,816 interviews have been carried in the last edition of the EWCS.

The sample used in the European Working Conditions Survey is representative of those aged 15 years and over (16 and over in Spain, the UK and Norway) who are in employment and are resident in the country that is being surveyed. In each country, a multi-stage, stratified random sampling design was used. In the first stage, primary sampling units (PSUs) were sampled, stratifying according to geographic regions (NUTS 2 level or below) and level of urbanisation. Subsequently, in each PSU households were sampled. In countries where an updated, high quality address or population register was available, this was used as the sampling frame. If such a register was not available a random route procedure was applied. In the 5th EWCS, for the first time, the enumeration of addresses through this random route procedure was separated from the interviewing stage. Finally, a screening procedure was applied to select the eligible respondent within each household.

The questionnaire covers issues of 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. Interviews last about 40 minutes and are carried face to face in workers homes; no proxy interview is allowed.

The EWCS objectives are to:

- Assess and quantify working conditions of both employees and the self-employed across Europe on a harmonised basis.
- Analyse relationships between different aspects of working conditions.
- Identify groups at risk and issues of concern as well as of progress.
- Monitor trends by providing homogeneous indicators on these issues.
- Contribute to European policy development in particular on quality of work and employment issues.

Quality of work and employment: state of knowledge

The slogan of the Lisbon strategy “more and better” strategy has put quality of work and employment on the forefront of the European agenda. Yet the understanding of what is quality of work and employment and how it should be monitored remains a matter of discussion.

It is multidimensional and goes above wages. Yet agreements on all these characteristics of work and employment that constitute it vary.

Its levels are the result of actions, and behaviours of a number of actors at the micro, meso and macro level.

Can one single figure be produced?

The operationalization of job indices³

A dedicated secondary analysis of the EWCS focussed on the operationalization of quality of work and employment. The work was carried out by Francis Green and Tarek Mostafa. This analysis underwent an extensive research and policy makers peer review.

The key decisions made to produce the indices were the following :

- trying to identify a common level in which all tripartite had an interest, positions and actions
- select the level where job quality would be most relevant to measure
- build on interdisciplinary research on the topic
- develop an objective approach to job quality and select the criteria of well-being as the key criteria to select these characteristics of work and employment that matter
- include risks but also resources
- support the selection of these characteristics of work and employment that matter with rigorous scientific evidence; the selection of which job feature were to be included in the indices, was supported by evidence in epidemiological studies gathered through prospective studies, which indicated an effect on well being
- these characteristics of work and employment which have been included in the indices.

Furthermore the indices build on a single data source which has a high degree of comparability and allow for multidimensional operationalization.

The intention was to reduce the complexity of the information by producing the minimum number of indices but not to the detriment of the quality of the information; in particular we wanted to avoid risk obfuscation .

The results

7 indices have been built which can be reduced in 4. These are the following:

- 1) earnings
- 2) prospects
- 3) intrinsic job quality which is divided in skills and development, a safe physical environment, a good social environment and an acceptable level of work intensity
- 4) working time quality.

The indices are based on 69 indicators;

³ Green F. and Mostafa T. (2012), Trends in job quality, Eurofound, <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2012/28/en/1/EF1228EN.pdf>

Index	Brief description of content	Items Used In Construction *
Earnings	Hourly earnings	EF10, EF11, Q18
Prospects	Job security, career progression, contract quality	Q77A, Q77C, Q6, Q7
Intrinsic Job Quality	Skill Use and Discretion (0.25) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> skills and autonomy 	Q61A, Q61C, Q49C, Q49E, Q49F, Q50A, Q50B, Q50C, Q51C, Q51E, Q51I, Q51O, Q24H, ef1_isced, isco_08_2
	Good Social Environment (0.25) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> social support, absence of abuse 	Q51A, Q51B, Q58A, Q58B, Q58C, Q58D, Q58E, Q77E, Q70A, Q70B, Q70C, Q71A, Q71B Q71C
	Good Physical Environmental (0.25) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> low level of physical & posture-related hazards 	Q23A to Q23I, Q24A to Q24E
	[100 - Work Intensity] (0.25) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> pace of work, work pressures, & emotional/value conflict demands 	Q45A, Q45B, Q46A to Q46E, Q51G, Q51L, Q51P & Q24G
Working Time Quality	Duration, scheduling, discretion, and short-term flexibility over working time	Q18, Q32, Q33, Q34, Q35, Q39, Q40, Q43

These can be described by gender, country, sector, establishment sizes, ownership, age , employment contracts etc. Results demonstrate different trade-offs and offset the possibility to develop a single index;

Cluster analysis has been performed to identify how these indices cluster together at the level of the individual job holders. As a result of this analysis, 20% of jobs in Europe can be classified as jobs at risk as holding this kind of job for some time is increasing the risk of an adverse effect on health and well-being; 14% are high paid good jobs, 37 are well balanced good jobs and 29% are poor balanced jobs.

Going beyond these indices ?

Supplementary analyses are being carried out to explore further the relevance of these indices.

1. Job quality and well being

For all indices, clear positive relationship between well-being and quality. As some effects are linked to dose exposure effect, the effect can be delayed and different according to individual.

The aspects more effective in shaping workers' well-being are the intrinsic job quality as well as prospects. These aspects of quality are not monetary. This confirms the importance to include work.

Negative relationship between quality and variability of well-being: variability decreases when quality improves. Once very good working conditions are achieved individuals have consistent levels of well-being. It is facing bad job quality conditions that differences in the individual and/or collective capacity to cope emerge: there are clearly many individuals who are capable of compensating their situation and people with worryingly low levels of well-being. This suggests the existence of threshold effects.

2. Job quality and gender

Women have increased their participation into the labour market.

Men and women situation on the LM are very different due to labour market segmentation, different valuation of work on top of gender pay gaps, different roles in the household as well as different support by welfare states (fiscal incentives for women to take up paid employment and care infrastructure for children and dependant relatives).

A forthcoming gender critique of job quality confirm different trade-offs between men and women, draw attention to an easy interpretation of what closing gender gaps over time may mean (they can be the results of the position of the most favourable gender that decrease rather than an increase of that in the least favourable position); it confirms the key role that public sector is playing in providing job quality and warns of risks of the second phase of the recession.

It argues that gender pay gap but also reconciliation issues are also key dimensions that need to be integrated to a wider framework on quality of work and employment; it draws the attention to the dynamic perspective that would need to be integrated.

3. Job quality and ageing

European workers are ageing; extending working lives has been promoted for more than two decades with some improvements in average exit rates; it is clear that this policy goal will depend amongst other factors on people 's work and employment, ultimately the quality of work and employment over their life course which will impact on their health and capacity to engage.

The characteristics of work and employment included in the indices are relevant to this topic; further studies will identify whether extra variables would need to be included in the indices to increase their relevance to this topic

Some final reflections

- The voice of workers has limitations but remains a fundamental source of information on job quality
- It is possible to develop an objective approach to job quality
- Trade-offs between the indices are numerous suggesting that one single index wouldn't be appropriate to guide policy
- As the definition of job quality is not consensual yet, it is important to be explicit about the level monitored, the selection criteria
- It is the responsibilities of policy makers to decide whether 20% of jobs at risks are too much or not but we should continue and hopefully agree on approach(es) to monitor quality of work and employment.

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