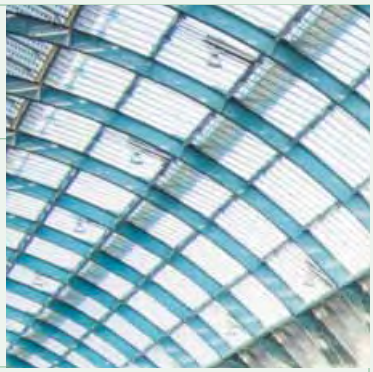
European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Eurofound Working Conditions Survey

Industrial cleaning: 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 industrial cleaning sector (NACE 81).[1] The findings are 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 562 workers in the industrial cleaning sector. This report compares aspects of work in the sector with the EU28 as a whole.

Structural characteristics

In 2010, 1.7% of European workers worked in the industrial cleaning sector. Employment in the sector increased by 8.7% between 2008 and 2010, and by a further 4.3% between 2010 and 2012. Countries where the industrial cleaning sector is relatively large are Spain (2.9%), Finland (2.5%), Germany (2.3%) and Austria (1.9%). The sector has relatively little prominence in Greece (0.6%), Bulgaria (0.5%), Malta (0.5%) and Romania (0.4%) (Eurostat, 2013).

A large proportion of workers in industrial cleaning (47%) works in micro-workplaces (1–9 employees), compared to 42% of workers in the EU28 as a whole.

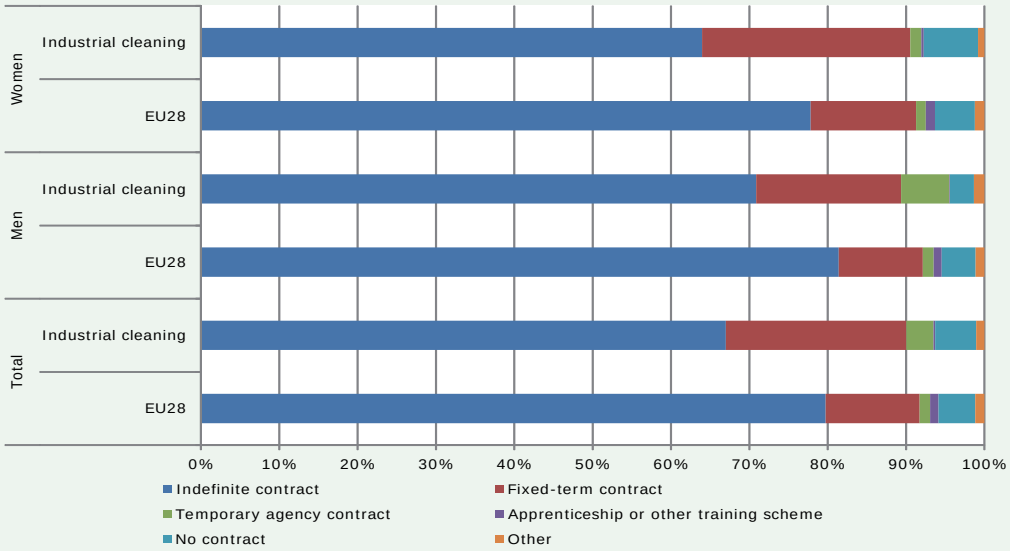
The proportion of workers in large workplaces (250+ employees, 8%) is lower than the EU28 average (12%). The sector employs slightly more women (56%) than men (44%) (Eurostat, 2013). Workers under the age of 25 (8%) and between 25 and 39 (30%) are slightly underrepresented in the sector compared to the EU28 (9% and 36% respectively), while the proportion of workers aged 50 and over (30%) is higher than the EU28 average (27%) (Eurostat, 2013). In industrial cleaning, 3% of workers are self-employed with employees and 9% self-employed without employees, which is slightly below the EU28 average of 4% and 11% respectively. Figure 1 shows that among employees, fixed-term contracts are much more prevalent in industrial cleaning (23%) than in the EU28 as a whole (12%) and are considerably more prevalent among women than men in the sector.

Industrial cleaning in a nutshell

- High incidence of part-time work and fixed-term contracts
- Most workers work typical and regular hours
- Low levels of employer-paid training
- There are high levels of exposure to physical risks, especially biological and chemical risks
- High proportion of employees are not very well informed about health and safety risks at work
- The impact of work on employees' health needs attention

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

Figure 1: Employment status, by gender



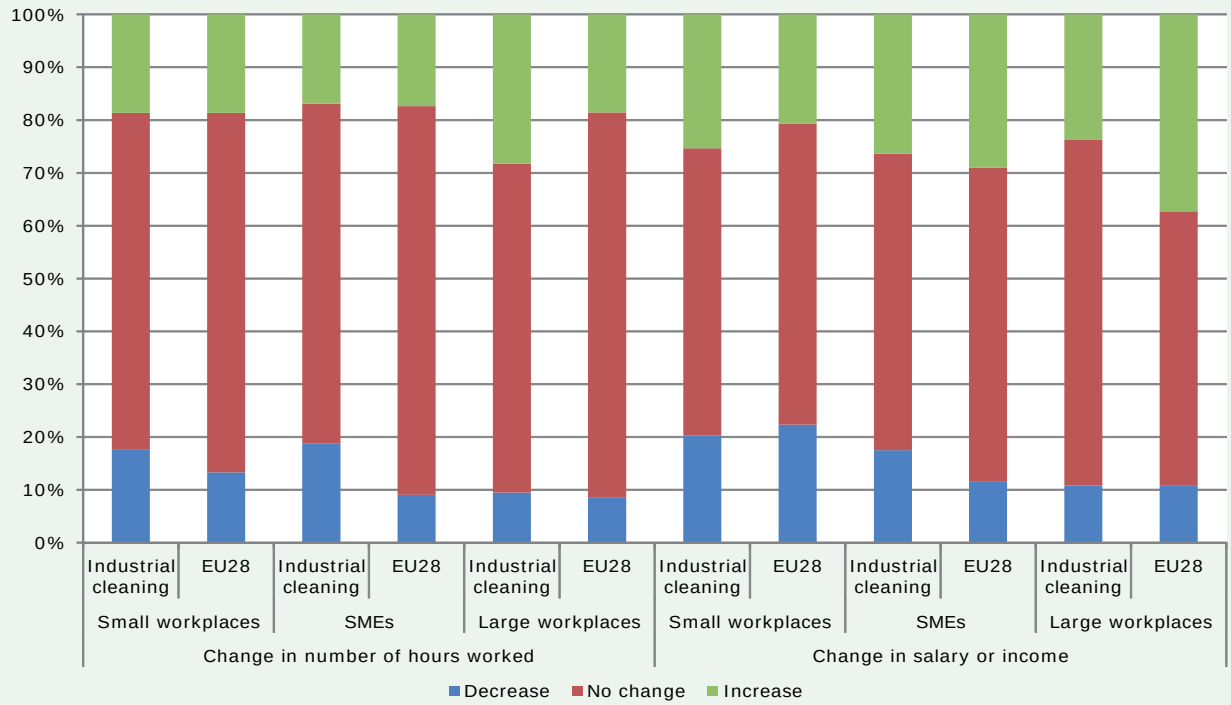
Working conditions

Changes since the crisis

Figure 2 compares the industrial cleaning sector with EU28 averages in terms of reported changes in hours worked and salary or income in the year preceding the survey. Overall, the proportion of workers in the sector reporting a decrease in working hours is slightly bigger than the share reporting an increase. However, the share of workers reporting a decrease in hours worked is much higher in industrial cleaning (18%) than in the EU28 (10%), with workers in small and medium-sized workplaces (SMEs, 10–249 workers) most frequently subject to working time reductions.

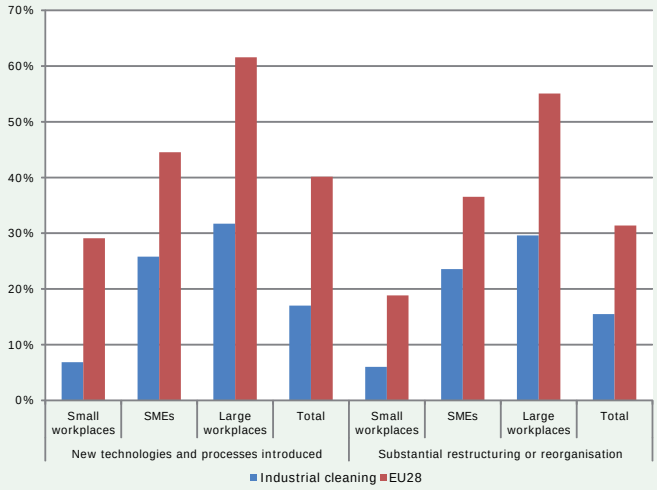
In terms of changes in salary, workers in industrial cleaning were slightly more likely to report a decrease than workers in the EU28 as a whole, and slightly less likely to report an increase. However, a very different pattern is found among the different size classes. Workers in micro-workplaces in the sector are less likely to report a decrease and more likely to report an increase in salary than workers in micro-workplaces in the EU28 as a whole. Workers in SMEs are more likely to report a decrease and less likely to report an increase than their EU28 counterparts, and workers in large workplaces are equally likely to report a decrease, but much less likely to report an increase than workers in large workplaces in the EU28 as a whole.

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



Workers in the industrial cleaning sector report a much lower incidence of restructuring and the introduction of new technologies than workers in the EU28 as a whole (Figure 3). The industrial cleaning sector follows the same pattern as the EU28, where the share of workers reporting the introduction of new production processes or technologies increases with the size of the workplace.

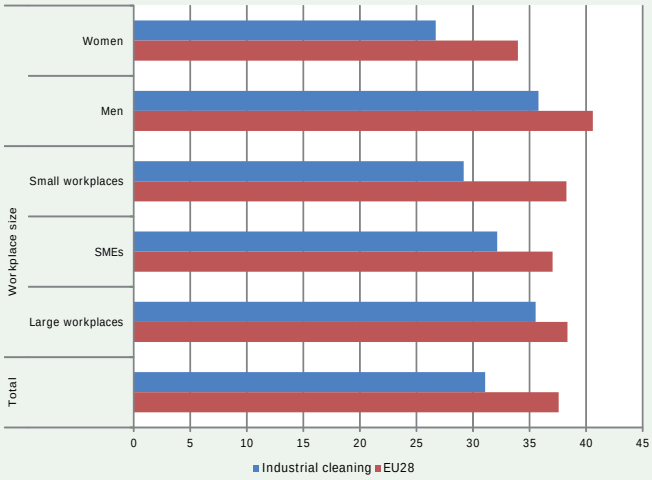
Figure 3: Restructuring and introduction of new technologies in past three years, by workplace size



Working time and work–life balance

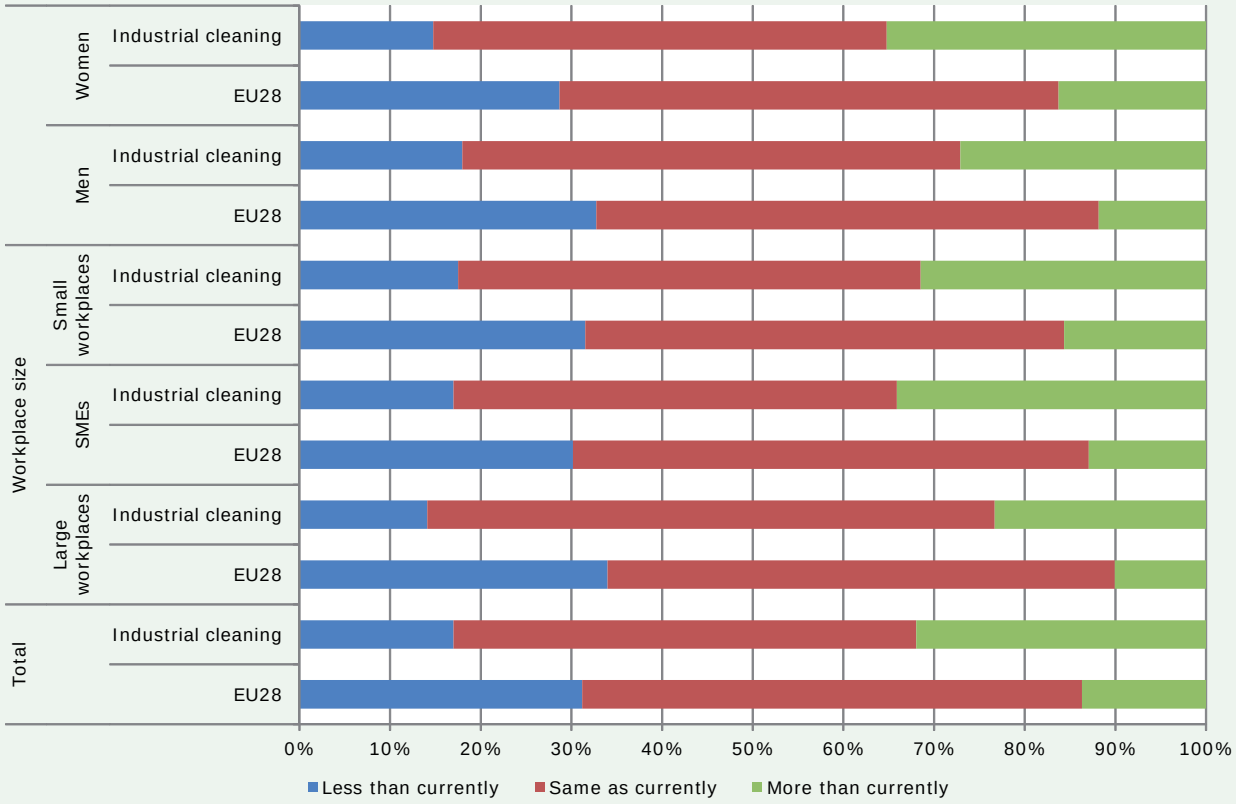
Workers in industrial cleaning work an average of 31 hours per week, compared to the EU28 average of 37 hours per week. This difference is largely due to the prevalence of part-time work in industrial cleaning. As in the EU28, men in industrial cleaning tend to work more hours on average than women (Figure 4). While the average working time in the EU28 does not show a clear pattern across the different workplace sizes, in the industrial cleaning sector the average number of hours worked clearly increases with establishment size.

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



Overall, workers in industrial cleaning appear to be less happy with their current working hours than the EU28 average (Figure 5.) Across all workplace sizes, workers in the industrial cleaning sector are considerably more likely than workers in the EU28 to express a preference for working more hours than currently (32% and 13% respectively). The proportion of workers in the sector wishing to decrease their working hours is much smaller (16%). This implies

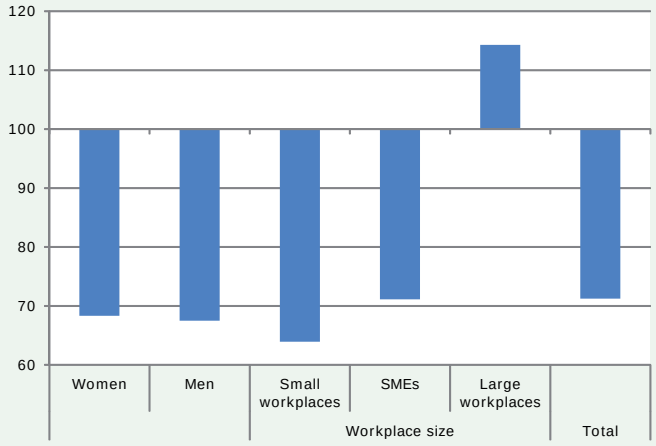
Figure 5: Working time preferences, by gender and workplace size



that a substantial part of the part-time employment in the sector is involuntary. Within the sector, workers in micro-workplaces are the most likely to express a preference for working fewer hours.

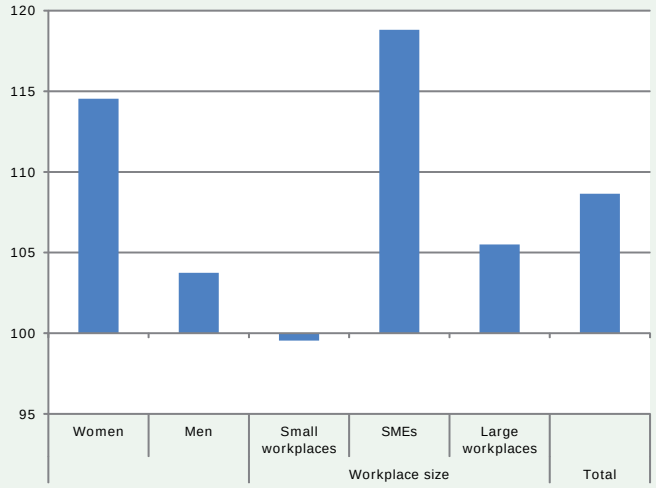
Figure 6 shows that working atypical hours (weekends, evenings and/or nights) is much less prevalent in industrial cleaning than in the EU28 as a whole, with the exception of workers in large workplaces.

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



On average, workers in industrial cleaning tend to have more regular working hours (working the same number of hours each day and the same number of days each week), compared to workers in the EU28 (Figure 7).

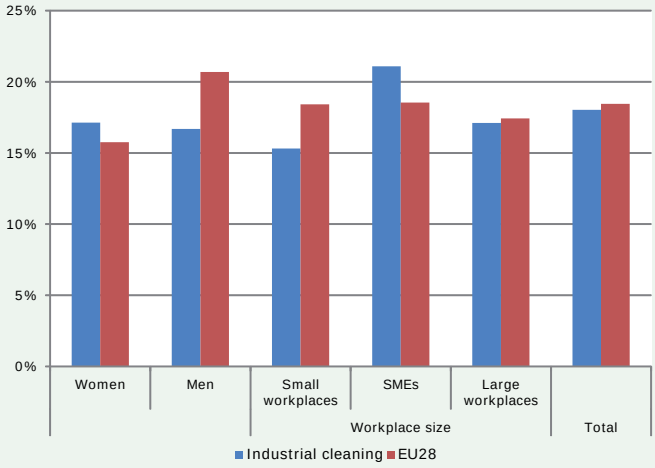
Figure 7: Index of regularity of working time (EU28=100), by gender and workplace size



The exception here is workers in micro-workplaces, whose hours are equally regular as the EU28 average and much less regular than in SMEs and large workplaces. Regularity of working hours tends to be much lower for men than for women.

Work–life balance (the fit between working hours and family or social commitments) in the industrial cleaning sector does not differ much from the EU28 average (Figure 8). In contrast to the EU28, men report less frequently a poor work–life balance in the sector. Workers in micro-workplaces in the sector are less likely to report a poor work–life balance and workers in SMEs in the sector are more likely to report a poor work–life balance than their EU28 counterparts.

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



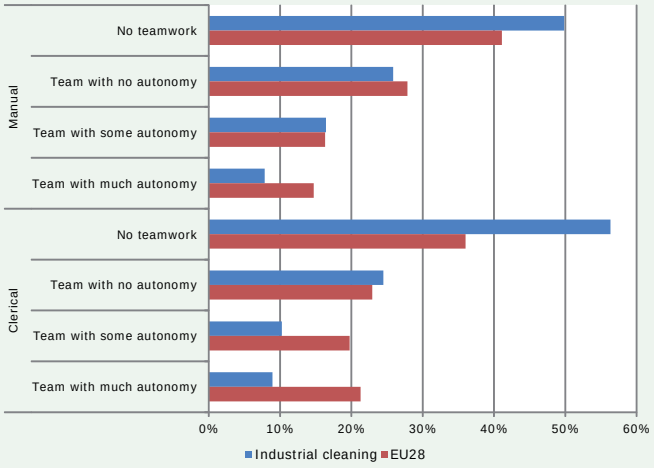
Work organisation

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 less prevalent in industrial cleaning (49%) than in the EU28 (62%; Figure 9). Workers in both manual and clerical occupations in the sector are more likely to report not working in a team than their EU28 counterparts.

Workers in industrial cleaning who do work in teams are most likely to work in teams that do not have any autonomy.

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.

Overall and across all workplace sizes, task rotation is less common in industrial cleaning than in the EU28 as a whole (Figure 10). However, autonomous fixed task rotation is more prevalent in micro-workplaces in the sector than in the average micro-workplace in the EU28, while management-controlled multiskilling is considerably less common. Conversely, and following the same pattern as the EU28, management-controlled multiskilling is the most common form of task rotation in SMEs and large workplaces in the sector.

Female bosses

The percentage of workers with a female boss in industrial cleaning (33%) is slightly higher than the EU28 average (29%). While the proportion of men who report having a female boss (15%) is higher than in the EU28 (12%), the proportion of women reporting a female boss is the same (47%). The overall percentage of workers with a female boss (33%) falls well short of the percentage of women in the sector (56%).

Skills and training

Overall, the majority of workers in industrial cleaning say that their present skills correspond well with their duties (Figure 11). Across all age categories, more workers report being 'over-skilled' than 'under-skilled'. Young workers are more likely to be over-skilled (35%) and older workers have considerably more skills than required for their tasks (40%) than the EU28 average worker (32%). All age groups are less likely than the EU28 average to report being 'under-skilled'.

The percentage of workers in industrial cleaning who report having received training is much lower than in the EU28 (Figure 12): only 14% of workers in the sector report having received training paid for by their

Figure 10: Prevalence of task rotation, by workplace size

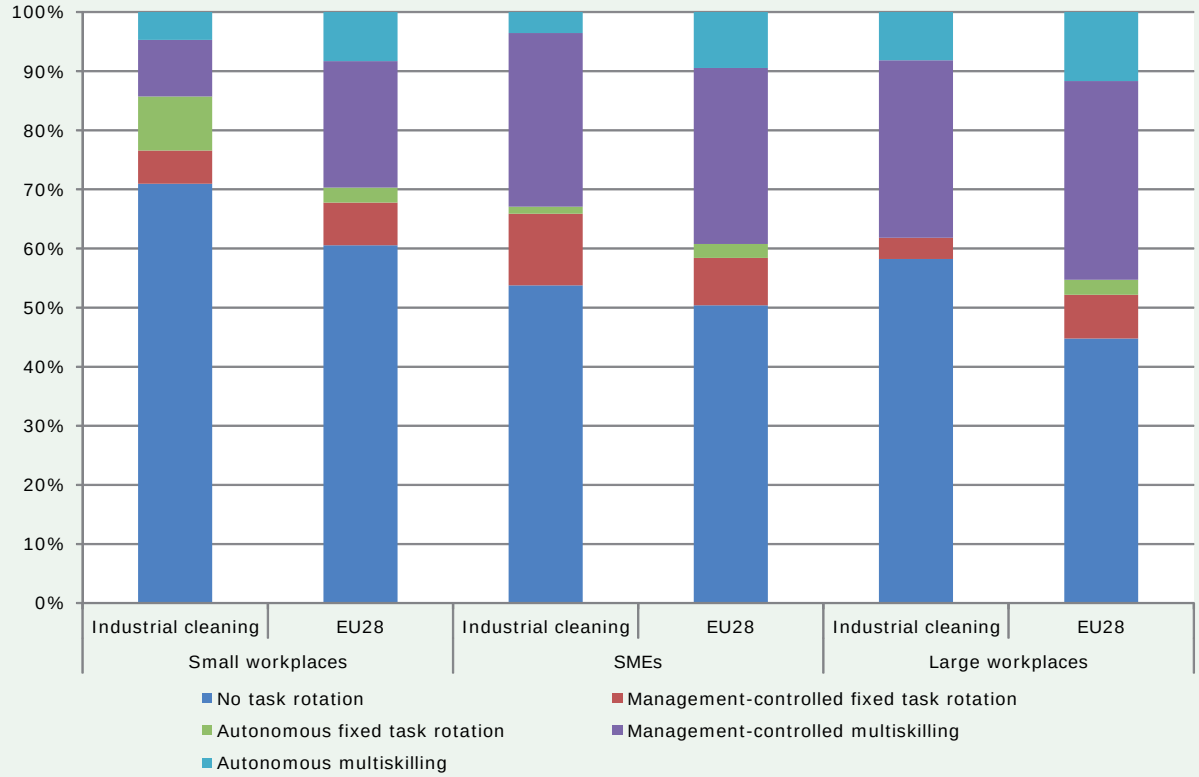
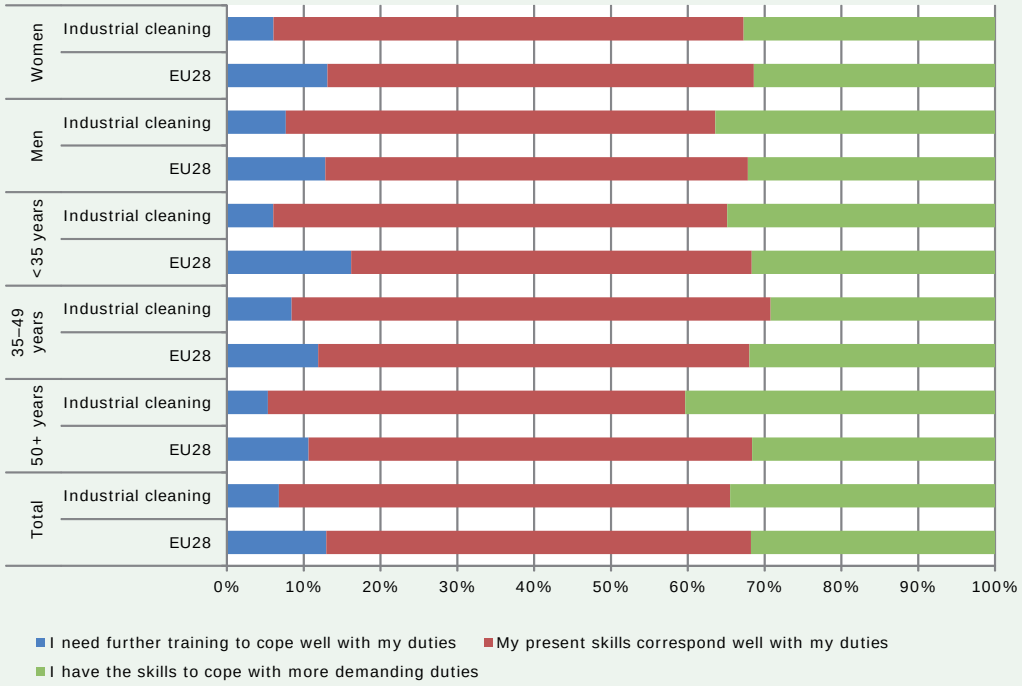
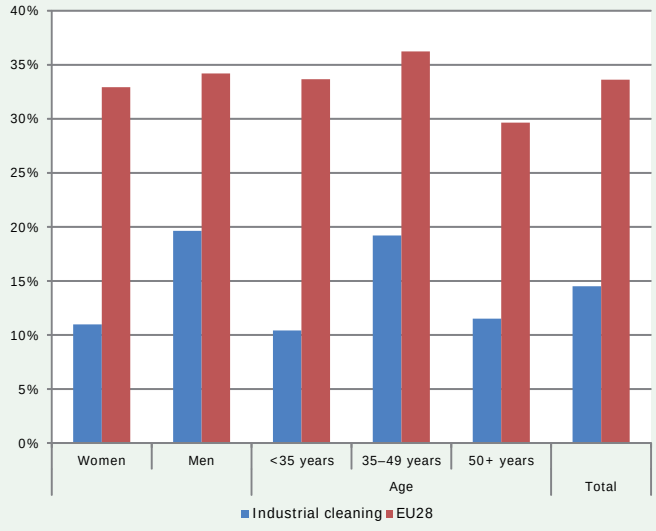


Figure 11: Match between skills and tasks, by gender and age



employer in the past 12 months, compared to 34% of workers in the EU28 as a whole. The difference is greatest for women and for workers under 35 years of age.

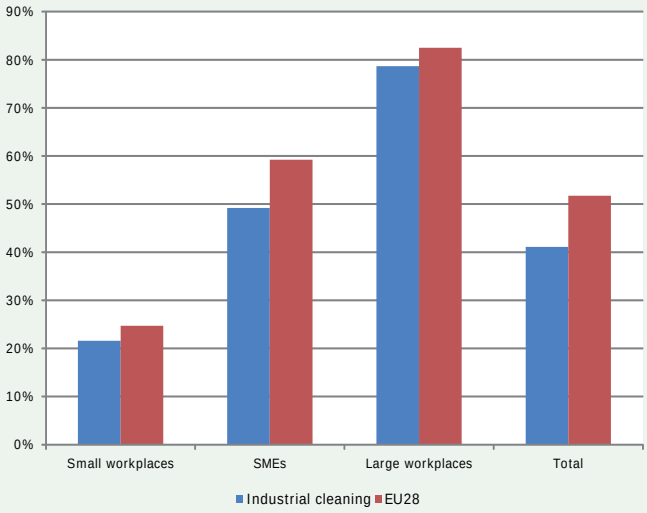
Figure 12: Employer-paid training, by gender and age



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 workplace size



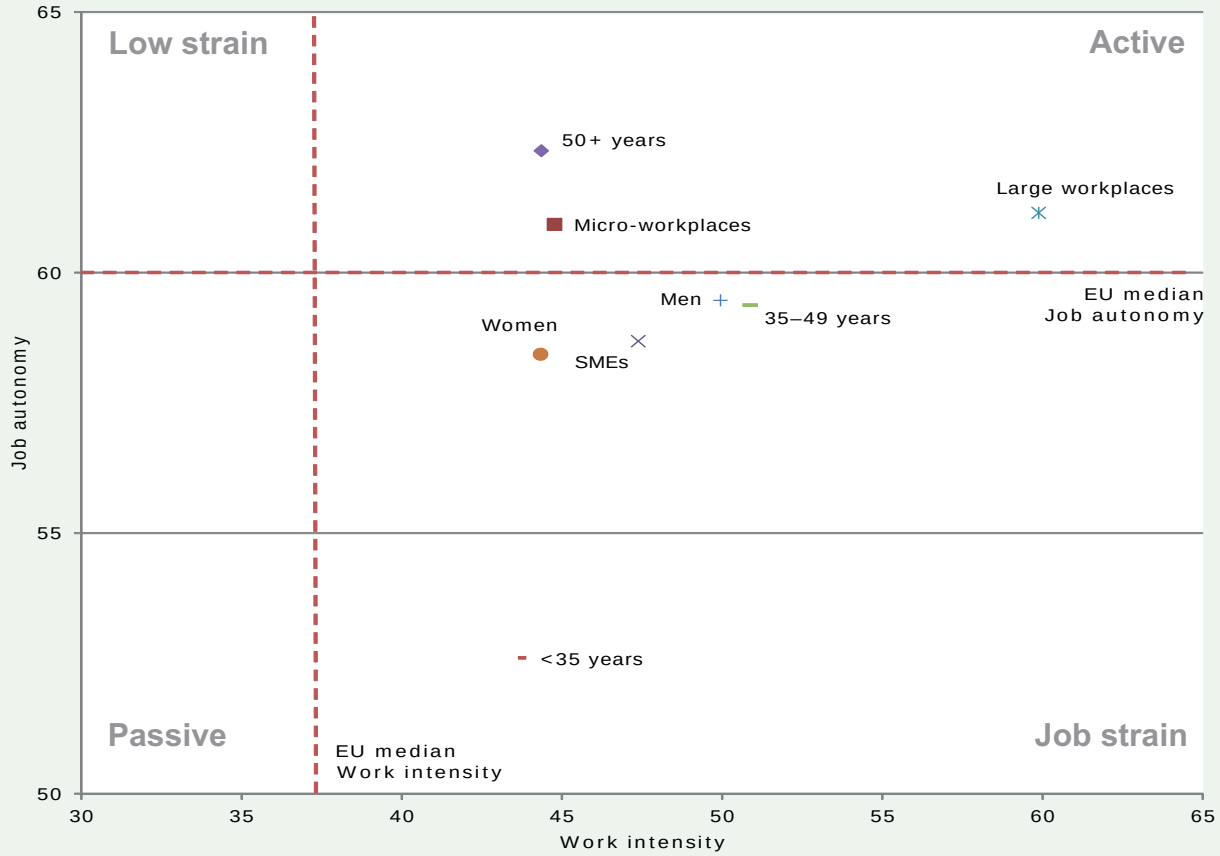
In 2010, 41% of employees in industrial cleaning reported that an employee representative was available compared to 52% of workers in the EU28. As in the EU28, in industrial cleaning the likelihood of an employee representative being available increases with workplace size. In SMEs in particular, the proportion of workers in the sector reporting that a representative is available is lower than in comparable sized workplaces in the EU28.

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

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



with high levels of demand while being limited in the control they have over the way they carry out their job.

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

In industrial cleaning, the top and bottom left quadrants are empty. The bottom left quadrant contains the so-called 'passive' jobs, characterised by relatively low levels of intensity and relatively low levels of autonomy. Workers in these types of jobs are at a low risk of work-related stress, but are at risk of frustration and lack of motivation.

The top left quadrant contains 'low strain' jobs, characterised by relatively low levels of work intensity and relatively high levels of job autonomy. Workers in these jobs are at a low risk of stress, and are not as likely to suffer from frustration and loss of motivation as those in passive jobs, but might not be challenged to realise their full potential. The fact that both these quadrants are empty for industrial cleaning suggests that levels of work intensity in the sector tend to be higher than the EU28 average for all workers.

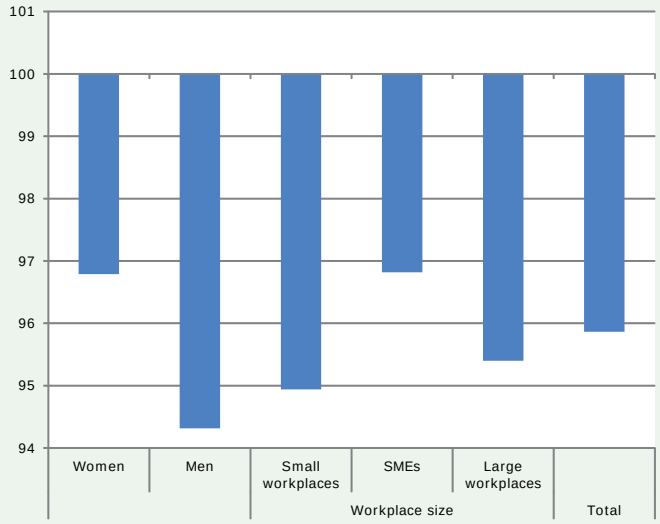
The top right quadrant contains the averages for older workers and workers in micro- and large workplaces. Workers in these categories tend to be in 'active' jobs: relatively high levels of work intensity combined with higher than average levels of job autonomy. Although their jobs can be very demanding, they have sufficient discretion to choose the way in which they do their job as well as to develop coping strategies through active learning and are sufficiently challenged to develop their potential to the full.

Finally, the most problematic category is 'job strain' in the bottom right quadrant which contains the averages for men, women, workers under the age of 50, and workers in small and medium workplaces in industrial cleaning. This implies that many jobs in industrial cleaning are characterised by higher than average levels of intensity as well as lower than average levels of autonomy. These workers, therefore, run the risk of accumulating high levels of unresolved strain, which can cause 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 to deal with high levels of work intensity. Although the differences are not large, scores for the good social environment index in workplaces in the industrial cleaning sector tend to be below the EU28 average (Figure 15).

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



Within the sector, women report a slightly better social environment than men, while small and medium-sized workplaces have slightly better average social environment scores than micro- and large workplaces.

Physical risks

Exposure to biological and chemical risks is the most prevalent risk in industrial cleaning, followed by posture- and movement-related risks and ambient risks (Figure 16). Overall levels of exposure to physical risks in industrial cleaning are considerably higher than in the EU28.

Manual workers report substantially higher exposure levels to these three physical risks than the EU28 average, with the exception of women in manual occupations, whose level of exposure to ambient risks is below the EU28 average. Levels of exposure are lower for workers in clerical jobs, but are still above average with regard to biological and chemical risks for both women and men.

Almost a fifth (18%) of workers in industrial cleaning report they were not very well or not at all well informed about workplace risks, almost twice the figure (10%) for the EU28 (Figure 17). The difference between the EU28 average is particularly striking for workers in large workplaces, 27% of whom report not being well informed about health and safety risks compared to a EU28 average of 8%. Interestingly, the pattern in the sector across workplaces sizes is the reverse of that in the EU28, with the proportion of uninformed workers increasing with workplace size, rather than decreasing.

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

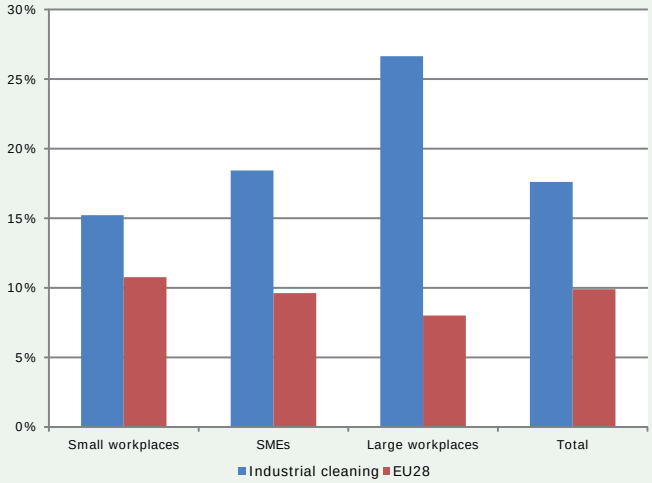


Figure 16: Indices of exposure to physical risks (EU28=100), by gender and occupational category

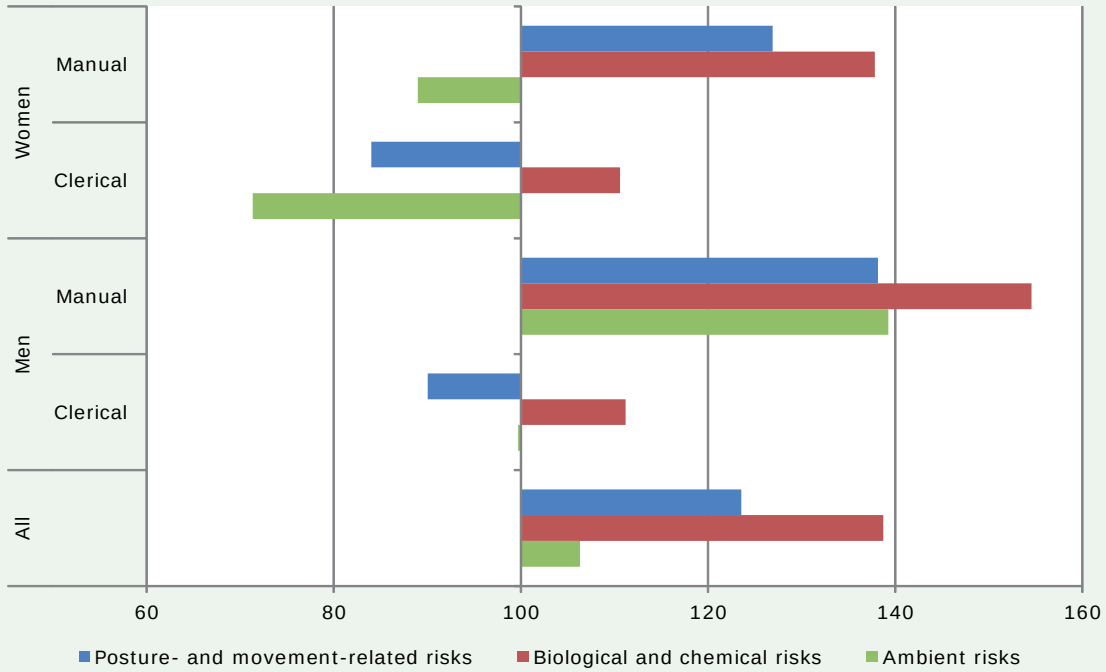
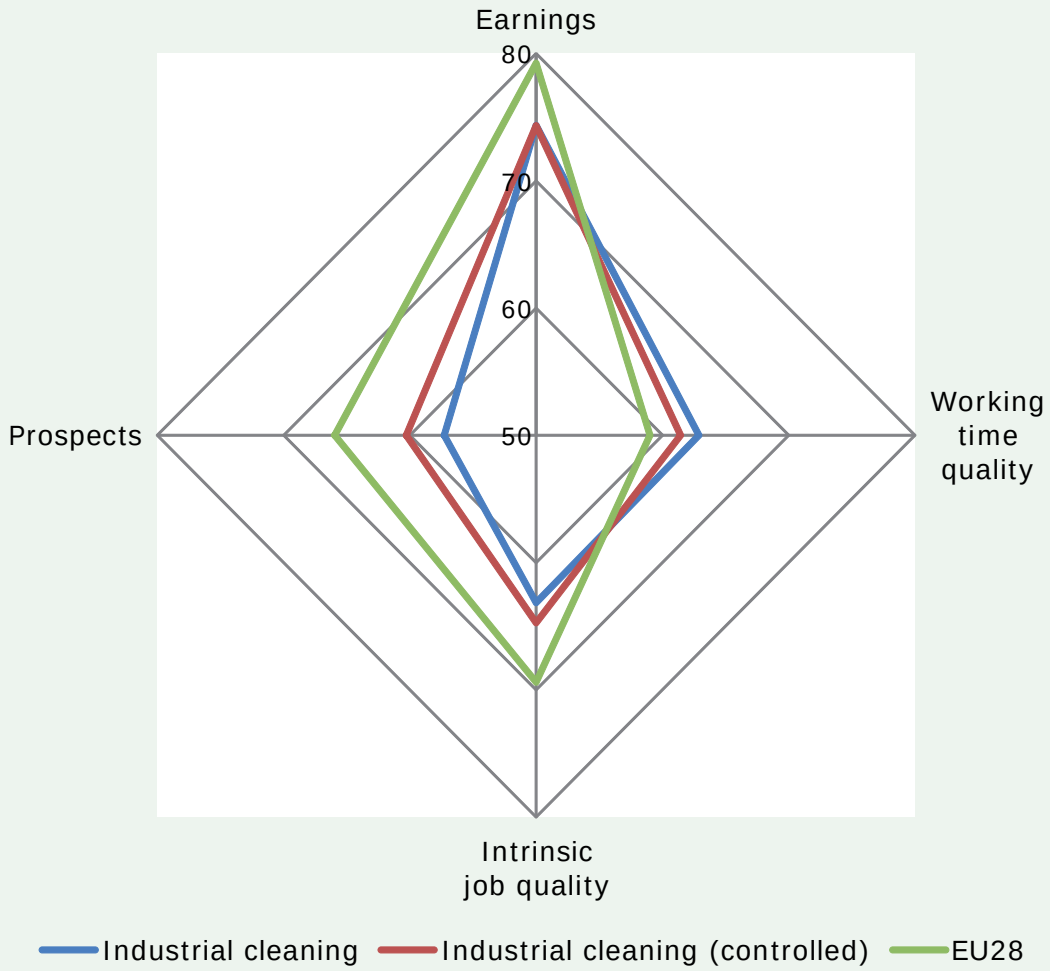


Figure 18: Job quality in industrial cleaning compared with the EU28



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

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 industrial cleaning sector. It shows the average score for the sector on each of the indicators, with and without controlling for the structural characteristics of the sector's workers (age, gender, workplace size, education level and country), and for the EU28. The graph shows that the industrial cleaning sector compares negatively with the EU28 average on three out of four dimensions: scores for earnings, prospects and intrinsic job quality in industrial cleaning are considerably lower than the EU28 average.

Working time quality in the sector is better than the EU28 average, mainly due to the relatively low number of average working hours in the sector. However, as mentioned earlier, many workers would like to work more hours than at present. When controlling for background characteristics of the workforce, the differences between the EU28 and the sector remain. These results suggest that even when taking into consideration the structural characteristics of the workforce in industrial cleaning, such as the fact that workers tend to have below-average levels of educational attainment, their job quality tends to be lower than for workers with similar profiles in other sectors.

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 industrial cleaning does not compare favourably with the EU28. Workers in the sector report a higher than average incidence of absenteeism due to work accidents and presenteeism (working when sick), and a higher than average proportion of workers report poor health and perceive their health to be at risk due to their work. Finally, a much lower proportion of workers believe they will be able to do their job when they are 60.

These differences remain when controlling for structural characteristics of the workers in the sector such as gender, age, education, establishment size and country, indicating that health at work and sustainability are issues that need to be addressed in the sector.

Figure 19: Health and sustainability of work

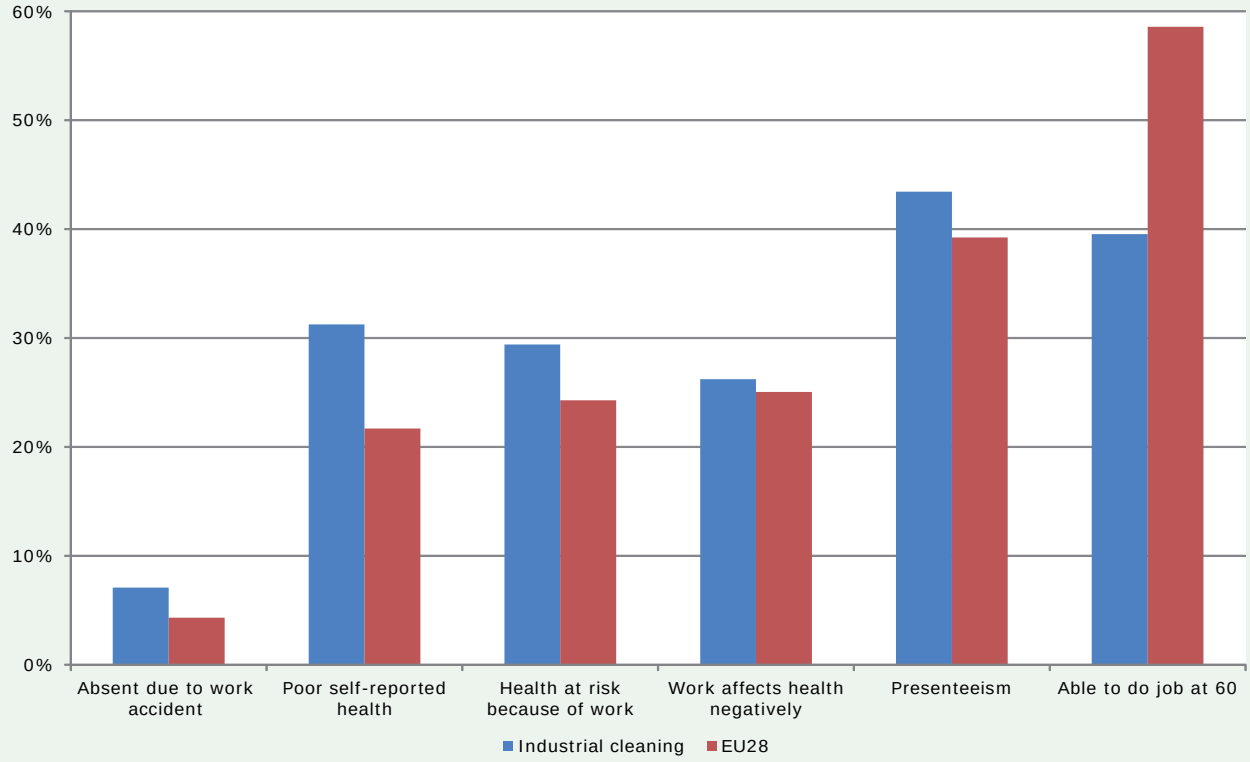
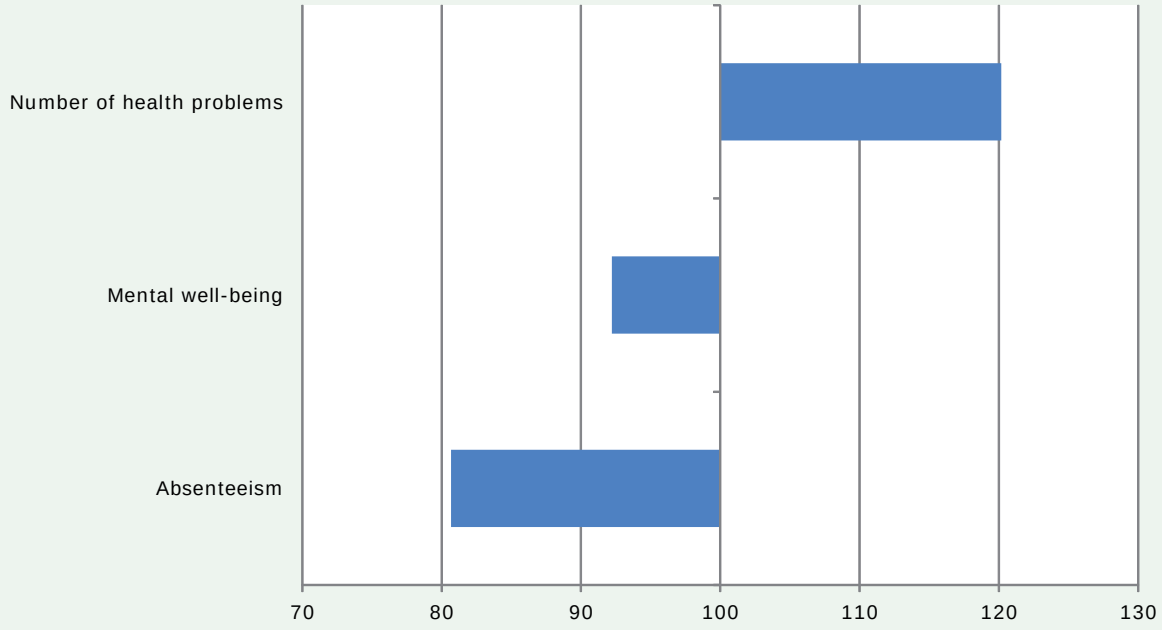


Figure 20 again portrays a negative picture of the industrial cleaning sector, with the number of reported health symptoms being significantly higher than the EU28 average, and mental well-being scoring lower. Absenteeism, however, is lower in the sector than in the EU28 as a whole. The differences between industrial cleaning and the EU28 average in relation to mental well-being and the reported number of health problems remain when controlling for structural background characteristics (age, gender, workplace size, education level and country), but the difference in relation to absenteeism is no longer 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.

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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