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# Occupations and ageing at work.

## An analysis of the findings of the fifth European Working Conditions Survey

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## Introduction

This working paper analyzes the data collected by the fifth European Working Conditions Survey done in 2010 (EWCS 2010 for short) to examine how working conditions are changing for different ages and occupation types. It brings insights into the quality of work and employment among ageing workers that help to inform the debate on how sustainable work is according to one's age and occupation.

The very broad background picture is that keeping older workers at work has been on the radar of EU employment policies since the 2000 Lisbon agenda, and filtered through to some extent into most national policies. EU policies set two hard targets known as the Stockholm and Barcelona targets. The Stockholm target set in 2001 was to achieve an employment rate of 50% for workers aged 55-64 in 2010. The Barcelona target set in 2002 was to raise the average labour market exit age of the over-50s by five years, also by 2010. These targets have been met in some Member States, not in others. The employment rate of 55-64-year-olds has indeed generally increased across the EU in the past ten years (European Commission, 2011, p. 204-208). A number of EU countries are openly talking about raising the statutory pension age past 65, whereas at present only the flexible retirement schemes in Sweden (61-67 years) and Finland (62-68 years) lay down a statutory pension age of above 65 years (Eurostat, 2012, p. 58).

But a longer working life cannot be brought down to just quantitative targets, as the European Commission itself acknowledges. The *2012 European Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity* campaign which makes active ageing in employment one of the three pillars of its programme affirms that: "Encouraging older workers to stay in employment requires notably the improvement of working conditions and their adaptation to the health status and needs of older workers, updating their skills by providing better access to life long learning and the review of tax and benefit systems to ensure that there are effective incentives for working longer".

A wide body of research points to the importance of qualitative factors in keeping older workers at work. Ergonomic research shows that some work situations, like painful positions, night or shift work, time pressure, frequently changing work organization, are a greater burden for older workers than others (Molinié *et al.*, 2012). Occupational health research emphasize the interplay between work performance and some aspects of general health, especially

chronic diseases, failing eyesight, hearing and sensorimotor faculties, and the decline in some physiological capabilities (Volkoff & Pueyo, 2008). Social psychology research has shown how stereotypes stigmatize older workers and create gender – and occupation – differentiated social perceptions and constructs that influence the quality of older workers' work life and the likelihood of their early exit from the workforce (Gaillard & Desmette, 2010). Sociology of work research looks into the relationship between age and job satisfaction, the value attached to experiential skills, the scope for self-fulfilment and recognition through work, and the opportunities and risks stemming from skills and technology development (Delay & Huyez-Levrat, 2006; CEDEFOP, 2010). Other social sciences research considers the relations between generations, the changing generational diversity of the workplace, the meaning given to work and the importance of work in life at different ages (Vendramin & Meda, 2010; Vendramin *et al.*, 2010). This gives a flavour rather than the whole picture of current research topics, aiming simply to show that the relationship between work and age is multifaceted and that a focus on employment rates or departure ages is far too simplistic.

The relative severity of different job roles is often cited to make the case for a differentiated, occupational category approach to the end of working years (OECD, 2010). But it is not just about physically demanding work or heavy manual labouring jobs. The later years of working life can also be difficult in teaching jobs, health care, the caregiving professions, and, more generally, any job particularly susceptible to the enforced faster paces, tiring positions and psychosocial workload that have characterized changes in work over the last twenty years (Eurofound, 2012).

This study therefore focuses on the relationship between age and working conditions from the angle of occupational categories. To do that, 18 occupational groups were first selected from the EWCS 2010 survey; their distribution by age and sex is described in the first part of the study. The employment situation of these 18 occupational groups is then analysed for three age categories: the under-30s, ages 30-49, 50 years and over. The third part looks at working conditions through eight indicators related to “sustainability” for each age group selected on the basis of research done for Eurofound (Vendramin *et al.*, 2012). The fourth section examines indicators of the perceived sustainability of work. The fifth and final part analyzes attitudes towards the prospects of working through to the end of a career.

The data used refer only to employees and to all 27 countries of the European Union (EU27).

# 1. A job role-differentiated approach

## 1.1 18 occupational categories selected

ISCO-08 (*International Standard Classification of Occupations, v2008*) classifies occupations into nine first-level major groups:

1. Managers: chief executives, senior officials and legislators;
2. Professionals;
3. Technicians and associate professionals;
4. Clerical support workers;
5. Service and sales workers;
6. Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers;
7. Craft and related trades workers;
8. Plant and machine operators and assemblers;
9. Elementary occupations (unskilled).

These 9 groups are then classified at a second level into 36 sub-categories. The requirements of this working document make it necessary to look beyond the 9 major groups to identify a number of specific occupational groups known from existing research to present special characteristics in terms of the age-work relationship, such as teachers, the health care and caregiving professions, retail trade occupations, the building trades, vehicle drivers, cleaning workers. Groups have therefore been created within the 36 sub-categories in order to highlight these occupations. Also, each group had to contain sufficient numbers within the EWCS 2010 sample for reliable statistical treatment. These criteria resulted in the selection of the 18 job categories listed in Table 1.

The data used refer only to employees and all 27 countries of the European Union. A detailed disaggregation within occupations makes it impossible to present the data by country.

Table 1 Job categories selected

ISCO-08 category Level 1 (*)	ISCO-08 codes Level 2	EWCS 2010 numbers	Category title	Details and examples of jobs
Managers	11-12-13-14	1623	Managers and executives	Including senior officials and political officeholders
Professionals	21-24-25-26	2006	Other professionals	Engineering, architecture, research, management, marketing, IT, legal, social sciences, culture, media professionals; artists
	22	693	Health professionals	Doctors, nursing professionals, pharmacists, dentists, allied health professions
	23	2009	Teachers	All levels of education, including non-formal training
Technicians and associate professionals	33-34	2777	Other associate professionals	Accounting, finance, real estate, business services associate professionals; specialized secretarial services; social workers; customs and tax inspectors; police officers; sport, arts and leisure occupations
	31-35	1102	Technicians	Industry, laboratory, transport technicians; supervisors, controllers; ICT and media technicians
	32	1036	Health associate professionals	Medical and paramedical technicians and assistants; nurses and midwives; health workers; inspectors
Clerical support workers	41-42-43-44	3178	Clerical support workers	Office, reception, counter employees and clerks, etc.; public and private sectors
Personal services workers	51-54	1727	Other personal services workers	Catering staff and housekeeping personnel; guides; public transport conductors/guards; hairdressers, beauticians, protective/security services
	52	2143	Sales occupations	Salespeople, cashiers/checkout operators, demonstrators
	53	1009	Personal care occupations	Healthcare assistants, child care, home and institutional caregivers
Agricultural occupations	61-62-92	603	All agricultural and allied occupations	All skilled and unskilled manual occupations in agriculture, livestock, forestry, fisheries
Craft and related trades workers	72-73-74-75	2720	Other manual industry and craft trades workers	Mechanical engineering, carpentry, electrical engineering, metallurgy, printing, food processing, wood and furniture, etc.
	71	1184	Manual building trades	Building trades other than electricians
Drivers and operators	81-82	967	Operators and assembly workers	Operators of industrial plants, assembly line workers
	83	1456	Vehicle or mobile plant drivers	Public and private transport drivers, cranes and mobile construction plant drivers
Elementary workers	93-94-95-96	1320	Other unskilled occupations	Industry and building labourers; goods handlers and delivery drivers; kitchen assistants; refuse collection and waste recycling workers
	91	1229	Cleaners and domestic helpers	Domestic helpers, domestic or industrial cleaners
<b>Total</b>		<b>28 780</b>		

\* Military occupations (codes 01-03) have not been included.



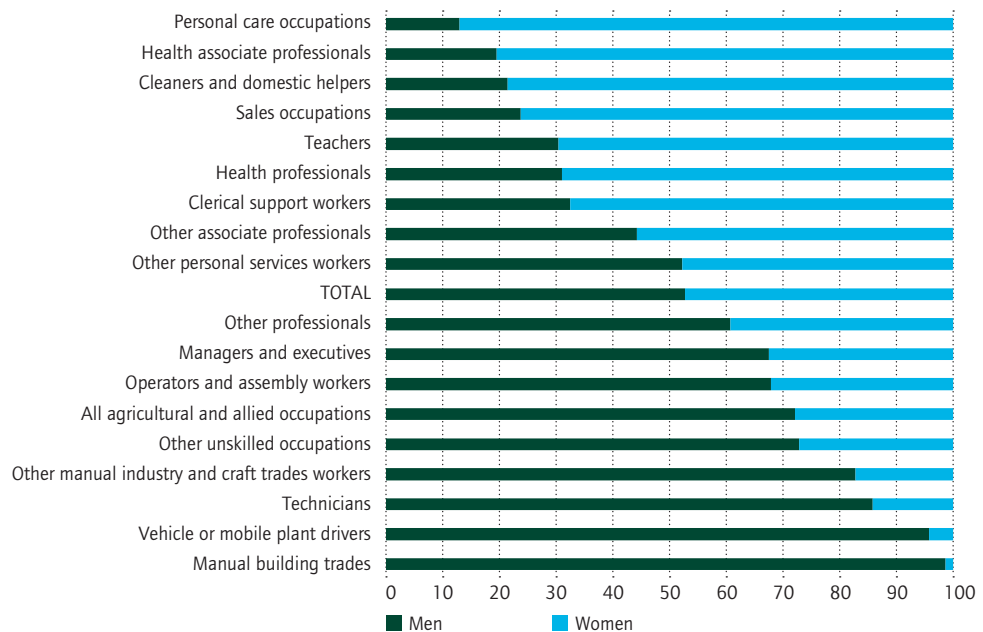
## 1.2 The gender distribution of occupations

The EWCS 2010 sample of respondents comprises 52.7% men and 47.3% women. As occupations are still strongly gender-segregated, there is a pronounced occupation-specific variation in this male/female proportion (Figure 1).

Women outnumber men in personal services, caregiving, education, clerical support and sales occupations. They also predominate in the so-called “technicians and associate professionals” jobs. The most female-dominated occupations are personal care (87.1%), health technicians and associate professionals (80.5%), cleaners and domestic helpers (78.6%), sales occupations (76.3%), teachers (69.6%), health professionals (69%), clerical support workers (67.5%).

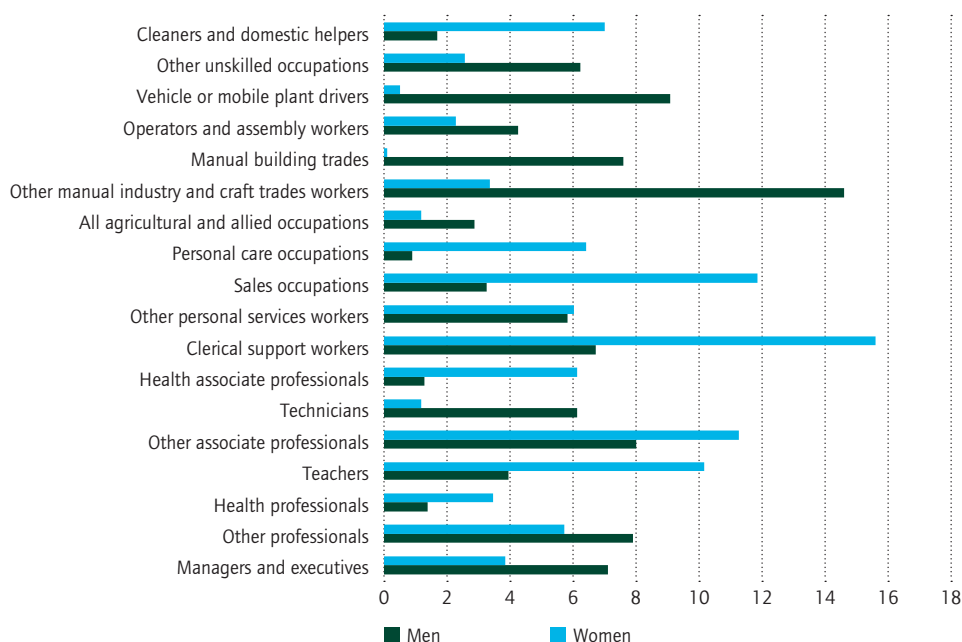
Men predominate in industrial, manual and technical jobs and the building trades. They also occupy most top managerial and executive positions. The bastions of male employment are the building trades (98.6%), vehicle or mobile plant drivers (95.7%), technicians (85.5%), other manual industry and crafts trades (82.8%), unskilled occupations other than cleaners and domestic helpers (72.8%).

Figure 1 Proportion of men and women by occupation (% employees in each occupational category, EU27)



While Figure 1 shows the occupation-specific gender balance, Figure 2 shows the gender distribution among the different occupations. Women more than men are concentrated in a handful of occupations: 16% work in clerical support jobs, 12% in sales occupations, 11% in associate professional occupations other than health and technicians, 10% in education – half of employed women work in these four categories of occupations.

Figure 2 Distribution of male and female employment by occupation (% of all male/female employees, EU27)



### 1.3 The age distribution of occupations

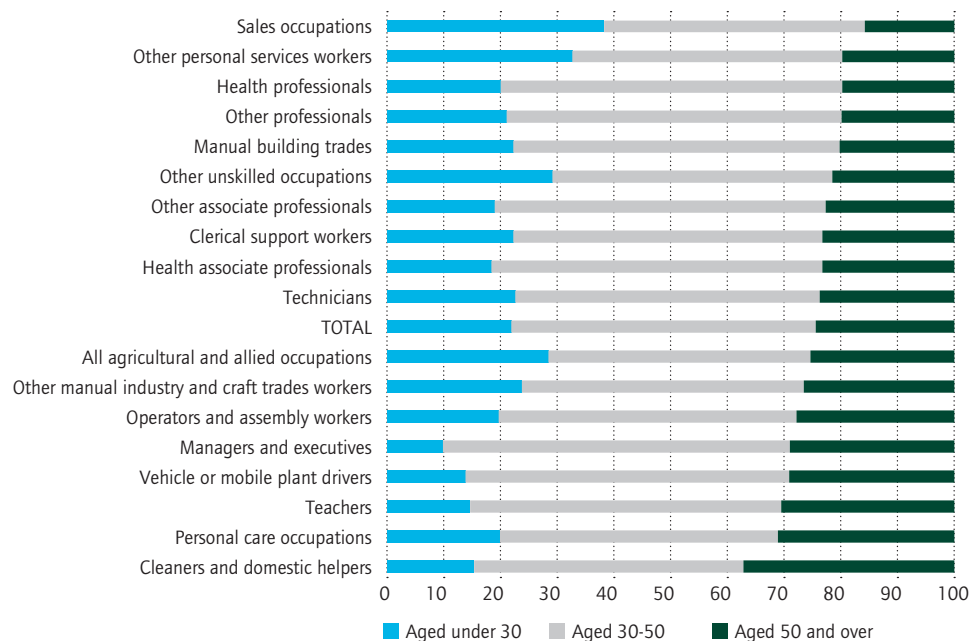
The sample of employees contained 21.8% aged under 30, 53.4% aged 30-49 and 24.4% aged 50 and over in all. Figure 3 shows the proportion of young and older people, and the median age group within each occupation.

It is clear that some occupations hold more opening for younger workers while others are more dominated by the over-50s. Sales occupations (38.3%), non-sales-related personal services and personal care (32.7%), unskilled occupations other than cleaning and personal social services have a higher proportion of young people aged under 30, for example, whereas the over-50s are proportionately better represented in the following jobs: cleaners and domestic helpers (37.2%), personal care occupations (31.1%), teachers (30.6%), vehicle or mobile plant drivers (29.1%), managers and executives (29%).

Slightly higher proportions of both younger and older workers are found in the agricultural and allied professions and among “other manual industry and craft trades workers”.

The gender make-up of the 50-and-over age group is changing in some occupations. The share of women in the “other personal services workers” category has decreased by 11.8 percentage points, and increased by 10 percentage points among operators and assembly workers. It has contracted by 7.7 percentage points in clerical support jobs and by 6.5 points among teachers. Men’s share has varied in direct relation. The relative proportions vary little with age in other occupations.

Figure 3 Proportion of three age groups by occupation (% of employees in each occupational category, EU27)





## 2. Employment situation

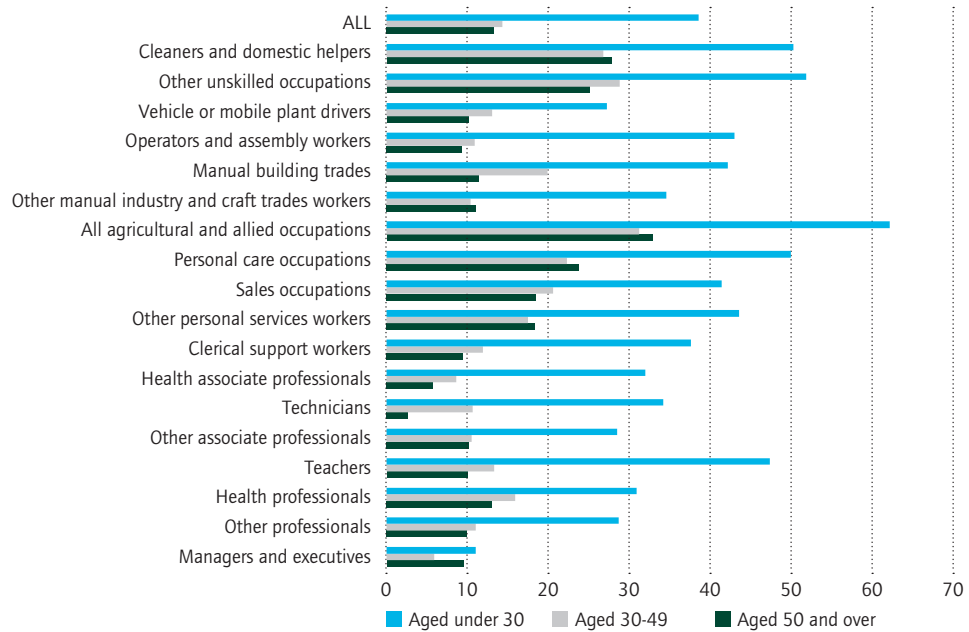
Two things stand out here: the share of temporary employment and the share of part-time work.

The extent of fixed-term employment among the under-30s is clearly shown in Figure 4. About half of young people aged under 30 are working on temporary contracts in unskilled occupations, agricultural and allied occupations, personal care and education, and more than 25% in all other occupations apart from senior executives. The extent of contractual precariousness in young people's employment, though, is a matter of record. What is rather more surprising is the amount of temporary employment among older people. In the EU27, 13.3% of employees aged 50 and older do not have permanent contracts (11.5% of men and 15.4% of women). Rates among those 50 and older are above average in the cleaning and domestic help, personal care, sales and other personal services occupations – all with a high proportion of women – as well as in the male-dominated agricultural and allied occupations and other unskilled occupations. Broadly speaking, contractual job insecurity is higher among unskilled than skilled occupations among those aged 50 and older.

Part-time employment is very unevenly distributed by gender and age. There is relatively little variation in the age-specific share of female part-time workers: 38% of the under-30s, 38% of 30-49-year-olds and 42% of those aged 50 and over. The variations are wider for men: 19% of under-30s, 7% of 30-49-year-olds and 12% of the 50 and over age group. Unsurprisingly, the frequency of part-time employment is much higher in female-dominated occupations. In addition to this uneven inter-occupation distribution, Figure 5 also shows two types of age group-specific part-time work. Some occupations are characterized by *part-time for entry into employment*, i.e., the proportion of part-time work is high among the under-30s, decreasing sharply among the 30-49-age group. This is the case with teachers, sales occupations, other personal services workers, agricultural and allied occupations, and unskilled occupations other than cleaning and personal social services. Some occupations, however, reflect a resurgence of part-time working among the 50 and over age group compared to 30-49-year-olds. Such *career wind-down part-time* is found in health care (professionals and associate professionals) and personal care occupations, sales occupations, agriculture, cleaners and domestic helpers. All barring agriculture are direct patient-, user- or customer-facing occupations. There are also the glimmerings of

career wind-down part-time in two categories where part-time working is not widespread: vehicle or mobile plant drivers, and professionals other than education and health professionals.

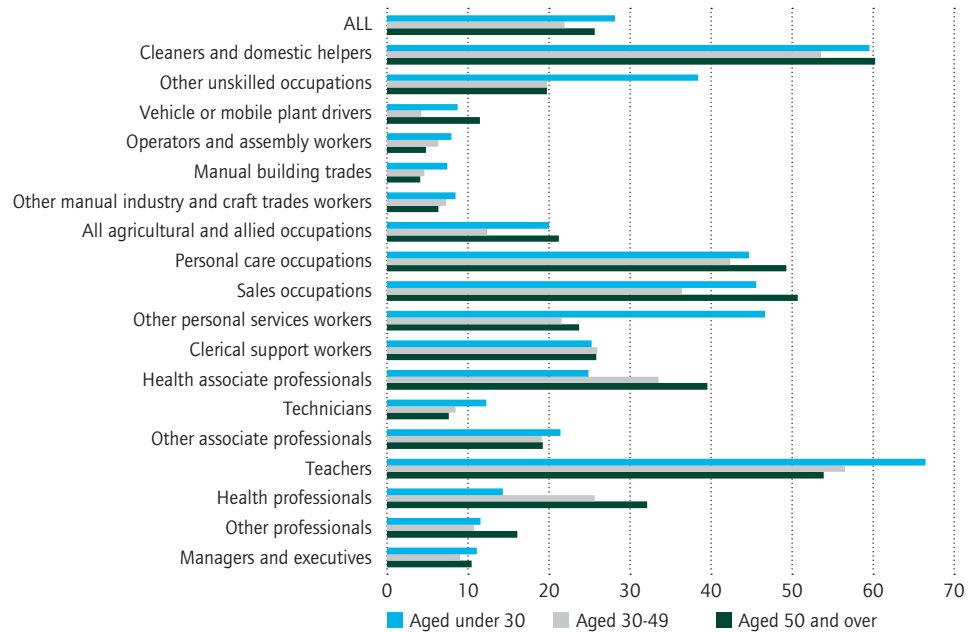
Figure 4 **Non-permanent contracts, by occupation and age** (*% of employees in each occupational category, EU27*)



These data show that fixed-term and part-time employment are still widespread above the age of 50, which challenges the stereotypical view of workers in their fifties as being in “standard” full-time, permanent employment.

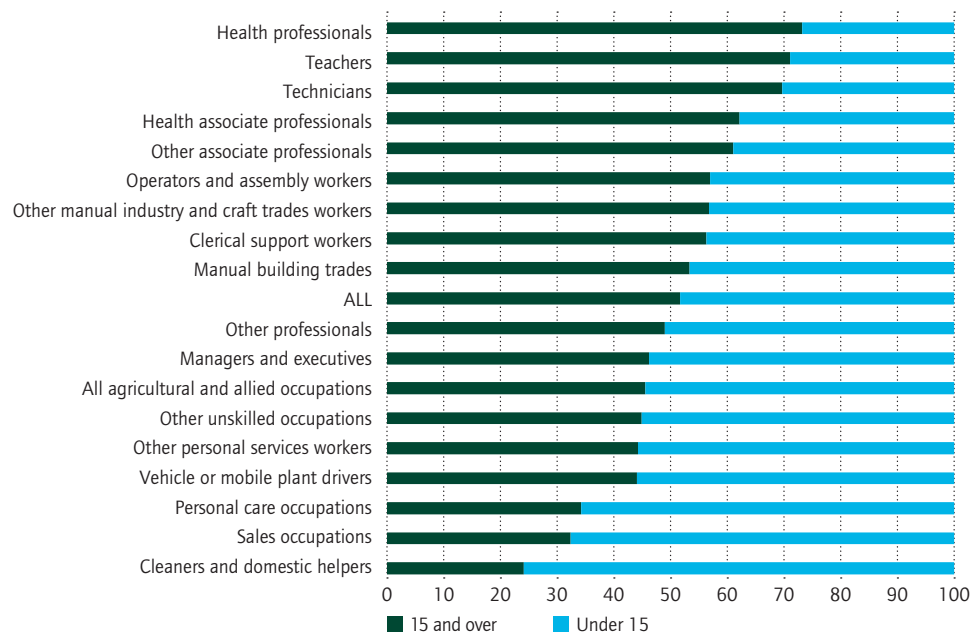
That picture is somewhat further undermined by the employment seniority of the 50 and over age group in the organization where they currently work (Figure 6). This Figure depicts the proportion of employees aged 50 and over with at least fifteen years’ service in their current company or organization. An average 48% of the 50 and over age group have less than fifteen years’ service (44% of men and 53% of women). There are wide differences between occupations. The highest proportions of short time-in-service (<15 years) are indicative of high worker mobility, and are found in personal care occupations, sales, cleaning and domestic help. Longer time-in-service, indicating greater stability, is found in the health care occupations, education, and among technicians and other associate professionals.

Figure 5 Part-time employment (\*), by occupation and age group (% of employees in each occupational category, EU27)



\* Eurofound defines a job as part-time employment up to 35 h/week, and full-time from 36 h/week.

Figure 6 Employment longevity of those aged 50 and over in their current organization (% of employees aged 50 and over in each category of occupation, EU27)







### 3. Age-specific quality of employment and work

The study on sustainability of work for an ageing workforce done for Eurofound (Vendramin *et al.*, 2012) considered different components of job and work quality in four main areas: working conditions (physical and psychosocial risks, work intensity, working hours), work-life balance, the expressive dimension of work (self-fulfilment, access to training, discretion in work, social support at work) and socioeconomic conditions. These aspects were chosen by reference to other research into work and employment quality (Green, 2006; Davoine *et al.*, 2008; Leschke & Watt, 2008; Muñoz de Bustillo *et al.*, 2009).

A multiple correspondence analysis statistical model has identified eight indicators that proved relevant to the age/work relationship:

1. Shift work (staggered or split shifts)<sup>1</sup>;
2. Painful or tiring positions at least half the time<sup>2</sup>;
3. Fast-paced work at least half the time<sup>3</sup>;
4. Compatibility of working hours with family and social commitments<sup>4</sup>;
5. Discretion in organizing tasks or working time<sup>5</sup>;
6. Social support from colleagues or superiors<sup>6</sup>;
7. Career prospects<sup>7</sup>;
8. The risk of losing their job in the next six months<sup>8</sup>.

The first three of these relate to working conditions; the fourth work-life balance; the next three, the expressive dimension of work; and the final one, social and economic security.

- 
1. Question 37f: Do you work shifts?
  2. Question 24a: Does your main paid job involve tiring or painful positions?
  3. Question 45a: Does your job involve working at very high speed?
  4. Question 41: In general, do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work very well, well, not very well or not at all well?
  5. Question 50abc: Are you able to choose or change (a) your order of tasks, (b) your methods of work, (c) your speed or rate of work?
  6. Question 51ab: Please select the response that best describes your work situation (always, most of the time, sometimes, rarely, never): (a) your colleagues help and support you, (b) your manager helps and supports you
  7. Question 77c: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements: (c) My job offers good prospects for career advancement.
  8. Question 77a: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements: (a) I might lose my job in the next six months.

This section reviews these eight indicators in terms of age-related differences between occupations.

### **3.1 Shift work**

The proportion of workers exposed to shift work (rotating, staggered or split shifts) might be expected to decrease after the age of 50 as a result of the collectively-agreed or organization-specific arrangements that many countries have for relieving older workers of the most extreme forms of non-standard working hours, particularly shift work. While there is certainly an age-related decrease in the proportion of shift workers, it is a slight one, declining from 23% among the under-30s to 20% among 30-49-year-olds and 17% of those aged 50 and over.

However, this general trend conceals wide between-occupation differences. Three scenarios occur:

- a significant age-related decrease in the proportion of exposed workers. This is true for professionals (including health care), operators and assembly workers, sales occupations and personal care occupations;
- a significant age-related increase in the proportion of exposed workers. This is true for associate professionals in health care, vehicle or mobile plant drivers, and to a lesser extent, technicians; this trend therefore runs counter to the general trend;
- little variance in the proportion of exposed workers between the 30-49 and 50 and over age groups. This is particularly true for manual industry and crafts trades, cleaners and domestic helpers, other unskilled occupations, personal services other than sales and personal care.

Operators and assembly workers, health care occupations, personal care, sales and other personal services are most exposed of all.

### **3.2 Painful positions**

While the health damage – especially musculoskeletal disorders – induced by some work positions is widely reported in the research, the striking finding is that the proportion of workers exposed to painful or tiring positions for at least half of their working time does not decrease with age. It stands at 30% among those aged under 30, 32% among 30-49-year-olds and is still 32% among the 50 and over age group, even though the health impacts of painful positions worsen with age.

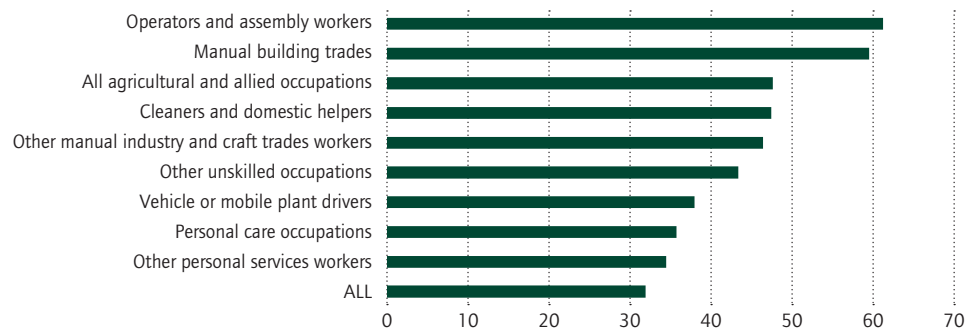
Two subsets of jobs are more exposed to painful positions. One, with the highest percentages (> 40%), is manual labour – agricultural and allied occupations, manual industry and craft and building trades, operators and assembly workers, cleaners and domestic helpers and other unskilled occupations – along with lower but still above average percentages in some service sector

jobs: health care professions (senior and associate), personal care occupations and other personal services.

Two categories of occupations show trends diverging from the mean. One is operators and assembly workers, who are more exposed to painful positions as they age: from 46% among those under 30 to 52% among 30-49-year-olds, rising to 61% of the 50 and over age group. It may be conjectured that the organizational forms of industrial mass production are not suited to allowing for age-related adaptations and that older workers perceive their working positions as increasingly painful. The other is health professionals and associate professionals where the exposure of those aged 50 and over decreased by 10 percentage points relative to the 30-49-year-olds, falling below average. This decrease should probably be attributed to work organization arrangements by which medical and paramedical staff move out of jobs with the most painful positions as they get older.

Figure 7 shows the categories of occupations with above-average exposure to painful positions of those aged 50 and over.

Figure 7 Occupations with above-average exposure to painful positions, those aged 50 and over (% of employees aged 50 and over in each occupational category, EU27)



### 3.3 Very high rhythms

The proportion of workers exposed to very high rhythms for at least half of their time decreases significantly with age: from 51% among the under-30s to 48% of 30-49-year-olds, down to 42% of the 50 and over age group. This trend is mirrored across all categories of occupation. The percentages among those aged 50 and over are lower in all cases than those under the age of 30 apart from among non-health and – education professionals. Figure 8 shows the categories of occupation with above-average exposure of those aged 50 and over to very high rhythms of work.

Figure 8 Occupations with above-average exposure to very high speeds, those aged 50 and over (% of employees aged 50 and over in each occupational category, EU27)



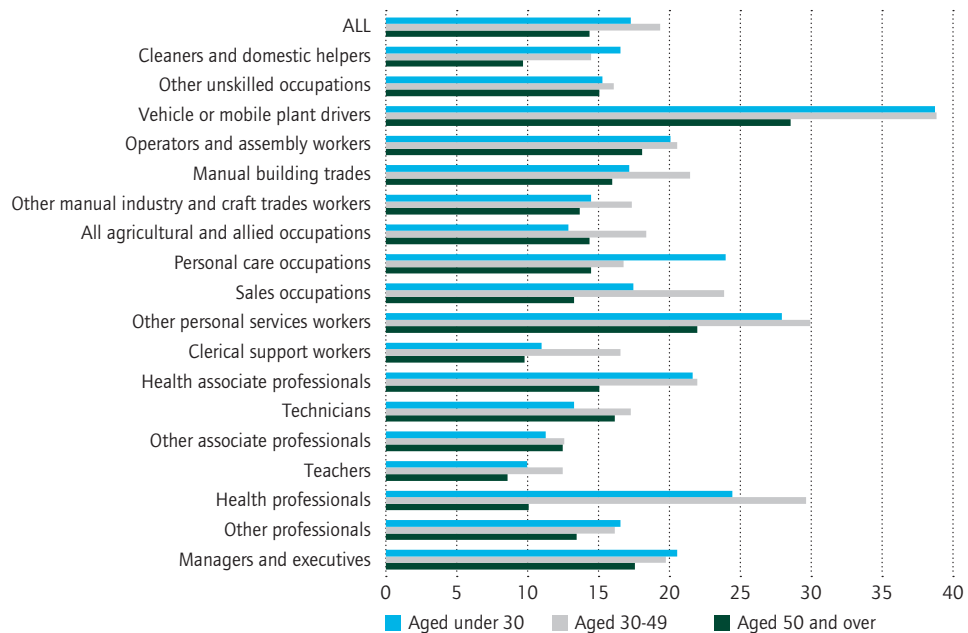
### 3.4 Conciliation

Generally, the proportion of workers claiming that their working hours do not fit in very well or not at all well with their family or social commitments rises from 17% for the under-30s to 19% among 30-49-year-olds, decreasing thereafter to 14% of the 50 and over age group. Some occupations experience “peak” levels of conciliation difficulties between ages 30 and 49: mobile plant and vehicle drivers (39%), senior health professionals (30%), personal services occupations other than sales and personal care (30%). Figure 9 shows a mixed age-related trend across the different occupational categories.

Gender gaps are non-significant but widen with age. Among the under-30s, 18% of men and 16% of women report work-life balance difficulties, compared to 22% of men and 17% of women between the ages of 30 and 49, and 17% of men and 11% of women among the 50 and over age group.

Part-time working may be an explanatory factor in these differences. Conjecturally, part-time work (which is female-dominated) is a – highly gender-unequal – way of balancing work and family commitments, which would explain why women report fewer difficulties balancing commitments than men. In that surmise, there would be fewer work-life balance issues in occupations where part-time working is more widespread. But that is not the finding. A comparison of Figure 5 and Figure 9 shows that a number of occupational categories are characterized by both a high proportion of part-time work and a high proportion of conciliation problems. This is the case with the health professions, personal care, sales and other personal services which are also highly feminised occupations. Part-time working does not therefore equate to a better conciliation between work and family or personal commitments.

Figure 9 Working hours not fitting in with family or social commitments  
(% of employees in each occupational category, EU27)



### 3.5 Lack of discretion in work

Lack of discretion in work is gauged through the lack of ability to choose or change the order of tasks, working methods or work pace. This is a bigger problem for younger than older workers: 41% of the under-30s versus 33% of 30-49-year-olds and the over-50s. There are significant between-occupation differences. Figure 10 shows the occupational categories with above-average exposure of the 50 and over age group to a lack of discretion in work.

The experience brought by age is not reflected by wider discretion in work in many occupations, not just manual and unskilled ones. There is also a persistent lack of discretion in sales occupations, personal services and among health associate professionals.

Gender gaps are minimal (approximately 1% either side of the average) other than among the over-50s where more men (36%) than women (29%) suffer a lack of discretion.

Figure 10 Occupations with above-average exposure to lack of discretion in work, those aged 50 and over (% of employees aged 50 and over in each occupational category, EU27)

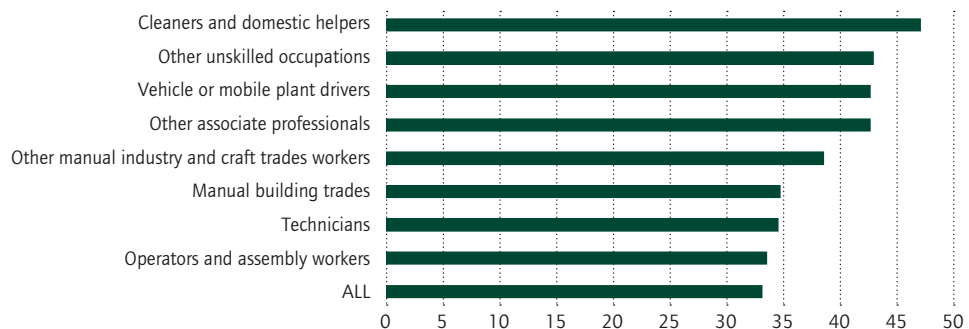


### 3.6 Lack of social support

In many occupations, a perceived lack of social support from colleagues or superiors increases between the 30-49-year-old and over-50 age groups. For all occupations, lack of social support affects 25% of those aged under 30, 28% of 30-49-year-olds and 33% of the over-50s. Here again, the gender gap is minimal (<1% either side of the average), except among the over-50s, where more men (36%) than women (30%) are affected by a lack of social support. The comparative decline in social support after age 50 is most marked among professionals and technicians and associate professionals, and also some manual occupations: the building trades, operators and assembly workers, unskilled occupations.

Among the over-50s only (Figure 11), the lack of social support is greatest among cleaners, domestic helpers and other unskilled occupations, among mobile plant and vehicle drivers, operators and assembly workers, manual industry and craft and building trades, and non-health-care technicians and associate professionals.

Figure 11 Occupations with above-average exposure to lack of social support, those aged 50 and over (% of employees aged 50 and over in each occupational category, EU27)



### 3.7 Lack of career prospects

The proportion of workers disagreeing with the statement that “my job offers good prospects for career advancement” increases with age, rising from 48% of under-30s to 58% of 30-49-year-olds, and 73% of the over-50s. More women than men see their career prospects as poor: 51% against 46% among the under-30s, 62% versus 54% among 30-49-year-olds year olds, and 77% compared to 69% of the 50 and over age group. The barriers to women’s careers (the “glass ceiling” and “sticky floor”) are well known and are reflected in these figures.

In other words, almost three-quarters of employees aged 50 and over view their career prospects as poor. This is a troubling finding in view of the intense political pressure to keep those in their fifties working longer.

A closer reading of the data on the lack of career prospects (Figure 12) indicates that the problem arises even before the age of 50. Except for professionals other than teaching, and non-health-care technicians and associate professionals, all other occupational groups already have a majority of 30-49-year-olds disenchanting with their career prospects.

Figure 12 **Lack of career prospects, by age** (% of employees in each occupational category, EU27)



These results suggest that workers see little future for themselves, and that employers are unable to provide attractive opportunities for career development throughout working life.

### 3.8 Job insecurity

The sentiment of job insecurity, measured by the fear of losing their job within the next six months, is higher among the under-30s (21%) than among 30-49-year-olds and the 50 and over age group (16%). This sense of insecurity among young people reflects the high proportion of fixed-term contracts in this age group (see Figure 4). Perceived insecurity is still high among the oldest workers, however, affecting one in six of them. The gender difference is indistinguishable from zero.

Among the 50 and over age group, job insecurity varies between the different occupational categories. The health care occupations, teachers, technicians and other associate professionals, as well as clerical support workers and personal care occupations are relatively sheltered from insecurity. In contrast, executives and non-health and -education professionals are exposed to insecurity to the same extent as the average for all occupations. Figure 13 shows the occupational categories with above-average exposure to job insecurity for those aged 50 and over.

Figure 13 Occupations with above-average exposure to insecurity in the current job, those aged 50 and over (% of employees aged 50 and over in each occupational category, EU27)



### 3.9 An interim conclusion

This selective overview of work situation indicators must be caveated by the fact that the EWCS survey refers only to employed workers, i.e., where the 50 and over age group is concerned, the “survivors”, those who have not left the workforce due to harsh employment or work conditions. Those results suggesting that the quality of employment for the over-50s is no worse and may be better than that of the under-30s can be interpreted in two ways. Either older workers are not being subjected to harsh working conditions as a result of various internal business arrangements or protective collective agreements, or those who had the harshest working conditions have already left through various early retirement schemes or due to industry restructuring that has improved average quality levels for those remaining.



While the results are for the European Union as a whole, and working conditions vary significantly between countries (Eurofound, 2012), the occupational category approach is a good “common denominator” in Europe. Differing institutional and regulatory contexts notwithstanding, the essence of an occupation presents fairly broad similarities across Europe, with the different occupational categories characterized by a broad common base in terms of job content, work environment, and career development in all countries. Hence the relevance of the occupational category approach to a pan-European analysis.



## 4. The perceived sustainability of work

The previous section discussed various characteristics of work situations experienced by employees in different occupational categories. This section considers employees' perceptions of how these work situations impact on their health, job satisfaction and well-being, focusing in particular on how age affects that perception.

A number of indicators influencing the perceived sustainability of work are considered based on a selection made in our study for Eurofound (Vendramin *et al.*, 2012). They are: general health<sup>9</sup> and particular health problems (backache<sup>10</sup> and sleep disorders<sup>11</sup>), satisfaction with working conditions<sup>12</sup> and psychological well-being<sup>13</sup>.

Health changes with age and working conditions. Figure 14 shows for the different occupations how self-perceived health is related to job type. Firstly, general health declines with age; the percentages of "poor perceived health" are lower for all occupations combined among the 30-49-year-olds – and lower still among the under 30s not included in the Figure.

Among the 50 and over group, more than 40% of workers in seven occupational categories claimed not to be in good general health:

1. Mobile plant and vehicle drivers (49%);
2. Other unskilled occupations (47%);
3. Operators and assembly workers (46%);
4. Cleaners and domestic helpers (45%);
5. Manual building trades (45%);
6. All agricultural and allied occupations (43%);
7. Other personal services occupations (41%).

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9. Question 68: How is your health in general?

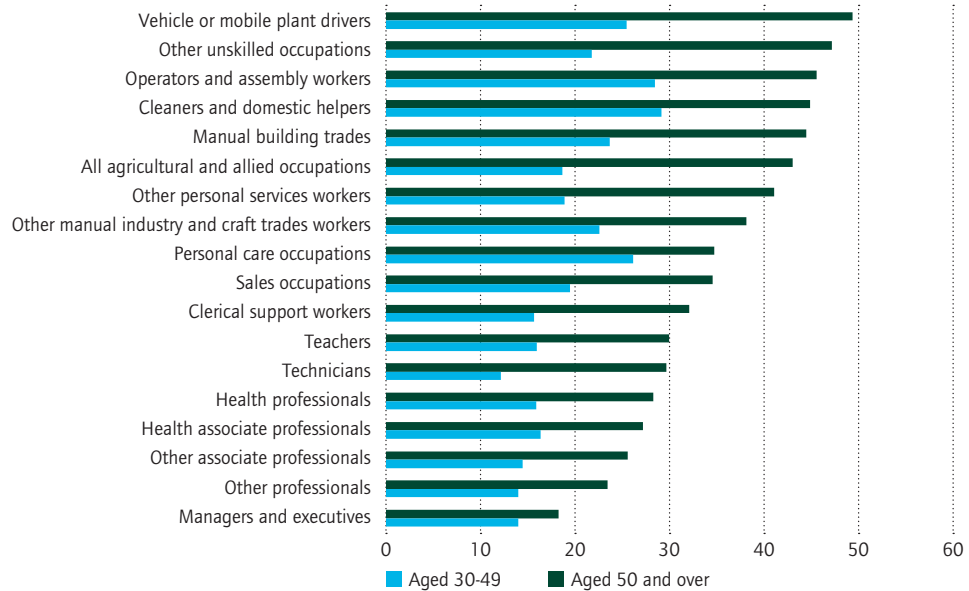
10. Question 69c: Over the last 12 months, did you suffer from any of the following health problems: backache?

11. Question 69m: Over the last 12 months, did you suffer from any of the following health problems: insomnia or general sleep difficulties?

12. Question 76: On the whole, are you very satisfied, satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with working conditions in your main paid job?

13. WHO-5 well-being index constructed from the scale of answers to questions EF4.

Figure 14 **Poor general health, by age and occupation** (% of employees in each occupational category, EU27)



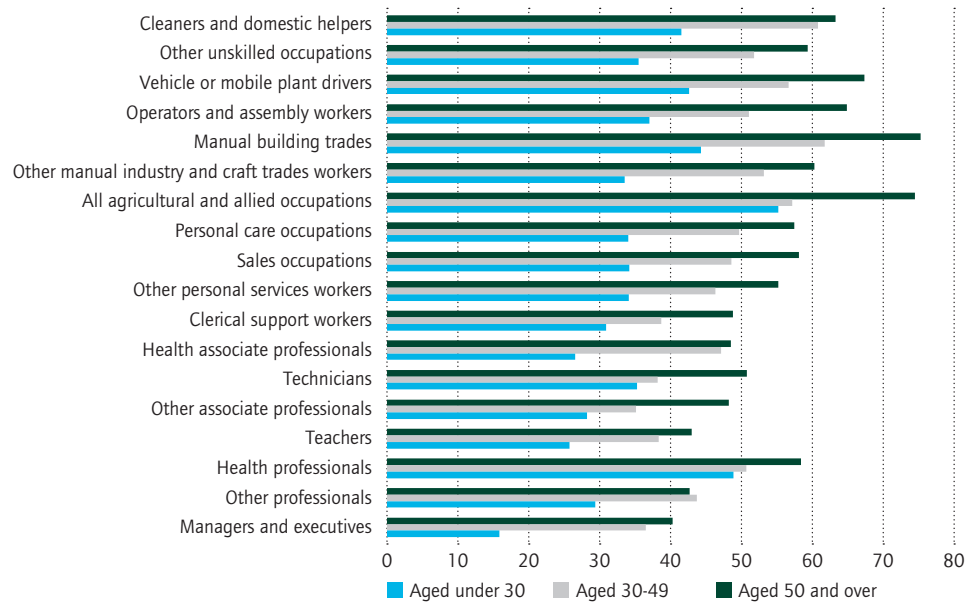
One in four workers aged 30-49 in some occupations is already reporting poor general health: mobile plant and vehicle drivers, operators and assembly workers, cleaners and domestic helpers, manual building trades, personal care occupations. The least affected are managers and executives (18%). These data bespeak the whole issue of social inequalities in health (Vogel, 2011).

Figures 15 and 16 show the prevalence of backache and sleep disorders by age, for each occupational category.

The frequency of back problems rises with age peaking among the over-fifties in certain occupations: manual building trades (75.3%), agricultural and allied occupations (74.5%), mobile plant and vehicle drivers (67.4%), cleaners and domestic helpers (63.3%). These occupations are also those where painful positions are most apt to be reported by the over-50s (Figure 7). Also notable is the significant proportion of younger workers in some occupations already affected by back problems: agricultural and allied occupations (55.2%), health professionals (48.9%), manual building trades (44.3%), mobile plant and vehicle drivers (42.6%), cleaners and domestic helpers (41.5%).

In some occupations, almost three in ten employees in the 50 and over age group are affected by sleep disorders: operators and assemblers (30.5%), personal care occupations (28.4%), teachers (27.5%), other associate professionals (27%). In many occupations, the numbers are already at or near peak in the median age group of 30-49-year-olds, especially among managers and executives, health professionals and other professionals, personal care occupations, mobile plant and vehicle drivers, and cleaners and domestic helpers.

**Figure 15 Back problems in the previous 12 months, by age and occupation**  
*(% of employees in each occupational category, EU27)*



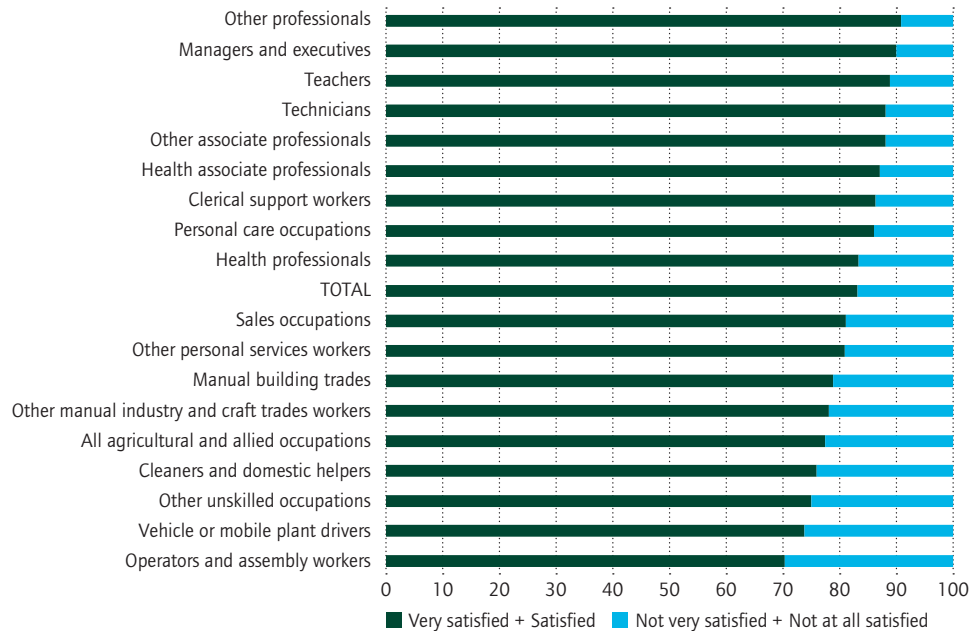
**Figure 16 Sleep disorders in the previous 12 months, by age and occupation**  
*(% of employees in each occupational category, EU27)*



Close similarities are seen in the responses from the different age groups to the question as to their degree of satisfaction with their working conditions. On an age-specific basis only, the percentages of “very satisfied”, “satisfied”, “not very satisfied” and “not at all satisfied” differ by a bare percentage point. By contrast, the responses for each occupational category show more than significant variations (Figure 17). Seven occupational categories contain the highest percentage of dissatisfaction: operators and assemblers (29.7%), mobile plant and vehicle drivers (26.2%), cleaners and domestic helpers (24.1%) and other unskilled occupations (25%), agricultural occupations (22.6%), manual building trades (21.2%) and other manual industry and craft trades workers (21.9%). They are also mostly (6 of 7 categories) the occupations with the highest proportion of workers reporting poor health in their fifties (Figure 14), and are likewise (6 of 7) among the sectors most exposed to a lack of social support among the over-50s (Figure 11) and among those with the poorer career prospects (Figure 12).

Personal services occupations, sales occupations and health professionals have a 15-20% dissatisfaction rate. Other occupational categories have less than 15% dissatisfaction, with a bare 10% among managers and executives and non-health and -education professionals.

Figure 17 Satisfaction with working conditions, by occupation (% of employees in each occupational category, EU27)



The gender-disaggregated proportion of dissatisfaction with working conditions is similar for many occupations (Figure 18). For some occupational categories, dissatisfaction is proportionally higher among women chiefly in the agricultural and allied occupations, followed by operators and assembly workers, other manual industry and craft trades workers and sales occupations.

Figure 18 Share of dissatisfaction with working conditions, by occupation and gender (% male and female employees in each occupational category, EU27)



While approximately 15% of workers in all age groups are discontented with their working conditions, specific age-related levels of dissatisfaction are to be found within occupations (Table 2). Dissatisfaction is highest among health professionals (29%), cleaners and domestic helpers (33.5%) aged under 30. In the 30-49 age group, the share of dissatisfaction was significantly higher in sales occupations (20.6%) relative to other age groups. The 50 and over age group is characterized by a low proportion of dissatisfied workers in agricultural and allied occupations. Apart from these occupation-related differences, there is a measure of similarity in the age group-specific assessment of working conditions within all occupations.

Table 2 Share of dissatisfaction with working conditions, by occupation and age group (employees, EU27)

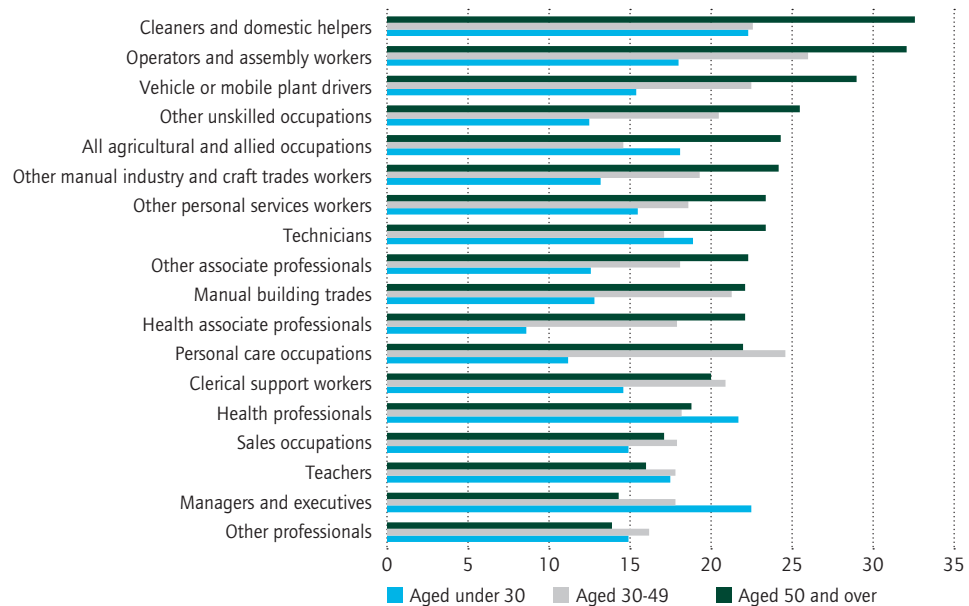
	Under 30	30-49	50 and over
Managers and executives	4.4	9.2	7.7
Other professionals	9.5	7.7	9.0
Senior health professionals	<b>29.0</b>	15.3	14.7
Technicians	12.0	10.1	12.9
Other technicians and associate professionals	11.8	10.7	12.4
Techniciens	8.8	10.1	12.7
Health technicians and associate professionals	5.8	12.2	13.3
Clerical support workers	11.4	13.0	14.1
Other personal services occupations	19.0	19.4	18.2
Sales occupations	15.5	<b>20.6</b>	9.6
Personal care occupations	14.1	15.7	11.2
All agricultural and allied occupations	26.9	26.6	<b>15.7</b>
Other manual industry and craft trades workers	14.2	18.2	18.7
Manual building trades	17.2	18.6	17.3
Operators and assembly workers	27.1	29.0	24.7
Mobile plant and vehicle drivers	23.0	27.3	24.5
Other unskilled occupations	21.7	22.8	24.7
Cleaners and domestic helpers	<b>33.5</b>	24.4	22.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>15.6</b>	<b>15.8</b>	<b>15.5</b>

Psychological well-being can be considered an indicator of wellness at work, but also as a predictor of attitudes towards labour market mobility or withdrawal. There is an ostensible link between psychological well-being and job role, and through them, working conditions. Figure 19 shows the proportion of workers reporting a low level of psychological well-being within the different occupations. It also records the type of advancing age-related change. The figure shows that for some occupations, age is relatively neutral for psychological well-being; the percentages show little age-related variation in the sales occupations, health professionals, teachers and other professionals. For the latter, the percentages of employees reporting a low level of psychological well-being are broadly similar in all age groups. Managers and executives are characterized by a declining share of employees reporting low psychological well-being as they grow older. Experience makes this type of job role more sustainable for the job-holders. Clerical support workers and personal care occupations show an increase in employees reporting low psychological well-being from their thirties onwards. Finally, for most other occupations, the share of employees reporting low psychological well-being rises with increasing age. The occupations with the highest rates of low psychological well-being among the 50 and over age group are cleaners and domestic helpers (32.6%), operators and assemblers (32.1%), mobile plant or vehicle drivers (29%). These latter occupations also fared badly for general health and satisfaction with working conditions. A number of other



occupations also received low psychological well-being scores of between 22 and 25% by those aged over 50.

Figure 19 Low psychological well-being index, by age and occupations (employees, EU27)



This section calls for the conclusion that health issues play significantly into occupation- and age-group-related perceptions of the impact of work situations. These health problems include both disorders indicative of exposure to physical or psychosocial risks (backache and sleep disorders), and personal assessments of general health and psychological well-being. The differences between occupational categories largely reflect social inequalities in health to the detriment of unskilled occupations and manual trades. But the results also point to warning signs for other occupations: teachers, health associate professionals, other associate professionals, and personal services occupations.

There is little age correlation with overall satisfaction with working conditions, barring in a small number of occupational categories (see Table 2). By contrast, there are wide between-occupational category gaps: the proportion of dissatisfied workers often varies by a factor of two between the most skilled and least skilled occupations.



## 5. Attitudes towards ageing at work

Having reviewed the main features of work situations as experienced by employees in different occupational categories (section 3) and their perceived impacts on health, satisfaction and well-being (section 4), this section now looks at age-specific differences in how employees contemplate the prospects of working to the end of their gainful lives.

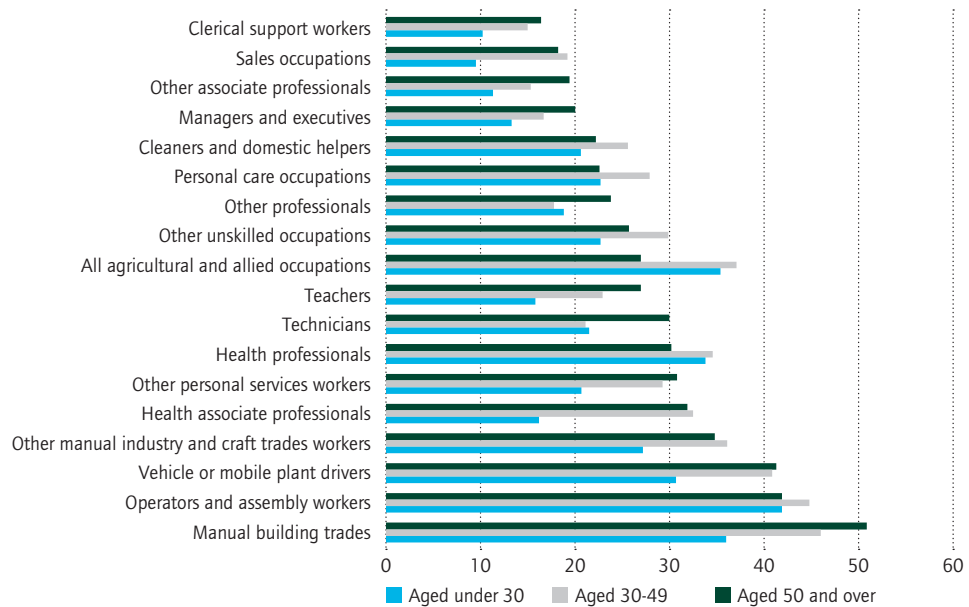
For that, a set of indicators can, up to a point, be used to gauge workers' views on the prospect of still doing the same job at the age of 60. They are the perceived negative relationship between the current job and health<sup>14</sup>, the feeling of being able to do the same job up to the age of 60<sup>15</sup>, and working time preferences, i.e., wanting to work more, as many or fewer hours a week than now<sup>16</sup>. These three indicators reflect key aspects of the sustainability of work with age. The fear of a negative health outcome from work is identified in research already mentioned (Molinié *et al.*, 2012) as a determinant in career change and early retirement decisions. The desire to reduce working hours when approaching retirement is not only a trend already identified in previous surveys (Villosio, 2005) but also a negotiating issue in collective agreements on career wind-down. The question on feeling still able to do the same job as at present on reaching the age of 60 has informed much discussion on the sustainability of the work since first being included in the EWCS survey in 2005.

- 
14. Question 67: Does your work affect your health or not? (no; yes, mainly negatively; yes, mainly positively).
  15. Question 75: Do you think you will be able to do the same job you are doing now when you are 60 years old? (yes, I think so; no, I don't think so; I wouldn't want to)
  16. The difference between the responses to Question 18: How many hours do you usually work per week in your main paid job? and Question 19: Provided that you could make a free choice regarding your working hours and taking into account the need to earn a living: how many hours per week would you prefer to work at present?

## 5.1 The perceived link between work and health

The proportion of workers who think their work is having negative health outcomes varies with the type of job done (Figure 20). It is higher in certain occupations and in some cases is age-neutral. Operators and assembly workers (4 in 10 employees) and health professionals (3 in 10 employees) are cases in point. The latter are negatively characterised by a set of observed indicators. In many other occupations, the proportion of employees perceiving a negative work/health outcome increases significantly after the age of 30, especially in the manual building trades where it reaches 50.9% among the over-50s, mobile plant and vehicle drivers, with 4 in 10 employees from the age of thirty, and associate health professionals and technicians and personal services occupations with 3 in 10 employees. In some occupations, the share of employees perceiving a negative health impact of their work declines among the 50 and over age group, especially in the agricultural and allied occupations, other unskilled occupations, personal care occupations and cleaners and domestic helpers. Conjecturally, age-related selection mechanisms may operate in these types of occupation giving rise to a labour market exit by older workers or job mobility that distances them from health-damaging jobs.

Figure 20 Respondents reporting that their job negatively affects their health, by occupation and age (employees, EU27)



## 5.2 Doing the same job at 60

Increasing the senior citizen employment rate is a challenge for most European countries. One survey question asks whether respondents think they will be able to keep doing the same job up to the age of 60. It is a question that means different things to different age groups. A negative reply to this question may be less an indicator of non-sustainability of the job for the under 30s than an expression of what younger workers want from their future employment. Career progression and mobility are what mostly lie behind this question. For older workers, keeping doing their present job until they reach 60 is in a very real sense more about the idea of sustainability of their current work from the perspective of ageing and the wind-down to retirement. This section looks at the replies of employees in their 40s and 50s, because decisions are thought out in their 40s and taken in their 50s. The proportion of employees aged 45-49 in each occupational category who thought they could keep doing the same job until they reach 60 is shown in Figure 21.

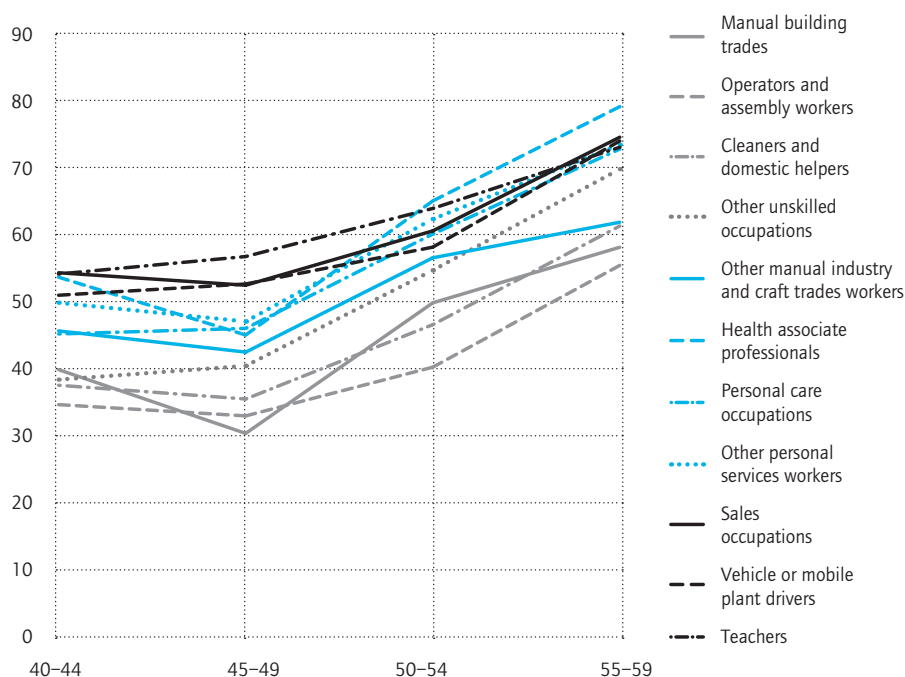
Figure 21 Share of the 45-49 age group reporting "yes, I think I will be able to do the same job when I am 60 years old" (employees, EU27)



In only a small handful of occupational groups did the current job feel doable up to the age of 60 by at least 7 out of 10 employees nearing their fifties – managers and executives (72.7%), other professionals (80.7%) and other associate professionals (70.1%). In eight types of occupation fewer than one in two employees in the same age bracket felt capable of doing the same job up to the age of 60. Among the manual building trades, operators and assembly workers, cleaners and domestic helpers, a bare third of employees thought it feasible. On top of these manual jobs, percentages below 50% are also found in some service occupations: health associate professionals, personal care and other personal services occupations. This relatively low proportion of affirmatives in most of the survey occupations speaks to the types of job and working conditions that may be sustainable from the viewpoint of a longer active working life.

Figure 22 shows the Figure 21 occupations in which fewer than 60% of employees aged 45-49 thought they could still be doing the same job at 60 and charts changes in that feeling between the age of 40 and the late 50s. There is a clear decline in the late forties – i.e., ages 45-49 – in many occupations, giving way to an upturn which continues rising towards the age of 60. This trend shift is highly pronounced among health associate professionals and the manual building trades, but is also to be seen among sales occupations, personal services other than personal care, and in other non-construction-related manual industry and craft trades workers. This Figure indicates that this age group (45-49 years) is probably where critical decisions are taken about working and retirement. This is probably the age at which age-related selection mechanisms take shape, i.e., job changes or decisions to depart early from the labour market. The proportions in all Figure 22 occupations rise between the ages of 50-54 and 55-59. There are two possible explanations: the burden of work lightens as the 60th birthday nears; and/or those workers in the least sustainable jobs may already have left the labour force.

Figure 22 Changes in replies "yes, I think ... 60 years old" between ages 40 and 59 in occupations where fewer than 60% replied "yes, I think ... 60 years old" at ages 45-49 (employees, EU27)

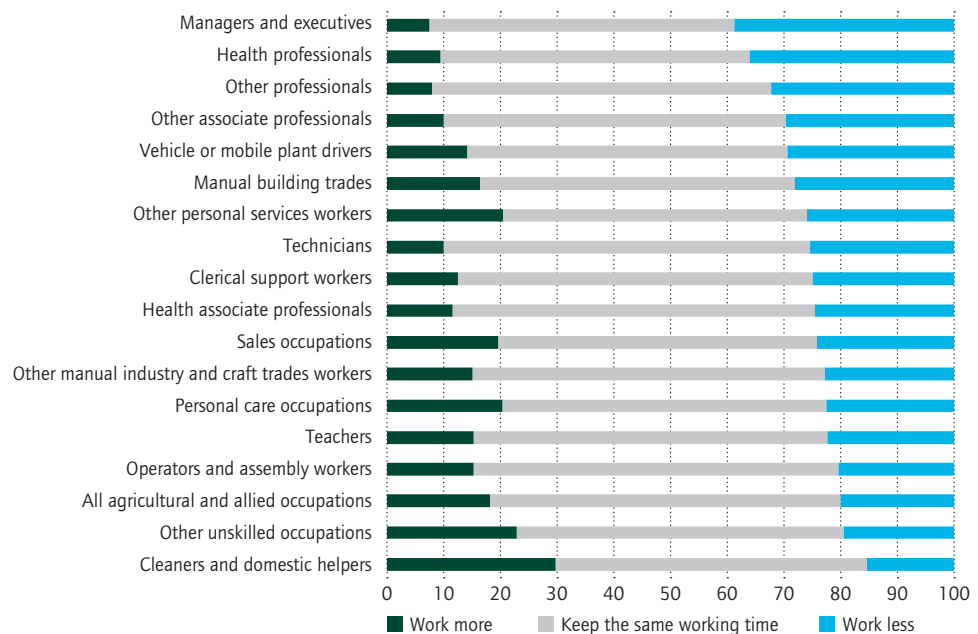


### 5.3 Working time preferences

Full- and part-time work is not equally distributed among different age groups or within all occupations (Figure 5). As a result, different expectations will be voiced at different times of working life depending on the employee's working time and the job they do.

Figure 23 shows for each occupational group the proportion of employees claiming to want to work more (work longer hours), less (work fewer hours), and keep the same working time. In all occupational groups apart from cleaners and domestic helpers and other low-skilled occupations, the proportion of employees wanting to work fewer hours outweighs that of those wanting to work more. This is particularly so for: managers and executives, health professionals, other professionals, other associate professionals, mobile plant and vehicle drivers, technicians, manual building trades, clerical support workers. These aspirations are partly related to the specific working conditions of the job, but also to the share of full- or part-time employment in these occupations.

Figure 23 Working time aspirations, by occupational group (employees, EU27)



It can be seen from Figure 24 that the shares of full-time employees wanting to work fewer hours are closely comparable for the three age groups considered: 26.7% for the under-30s, 31.6% for 30-49-year-olds, 32.1% for the 50 and over age group. The working hours preferences of part-timers reflect the share of involuntary part-time that prevails in the different age groups. So, 50.8% of part-timers aged under 30 would like to work more hours, compared to 35.6% of 30-49-year-olds and 29.8% of employees aged 50 and over.

Figure 24 Working time aspirations, by full-time/part-time and age group (employees, EU27)

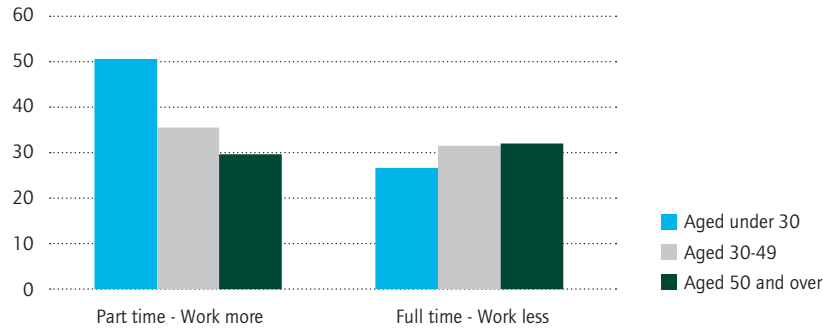


Table 3 shows for full-time employees the percentage of each age group within each occupational group wanting to reduce their working hours. One immediately striking finding is that among health professionals, 47.5% of those aged 30-49 would like to work fewer hours. Also noteworthy is the situation among teachers - 37.6% in the 50 and over age group would like to work fewer hours.

Table 3 Proportion of full-time workers wanting to work less, by age group (employees, EU27)

	Under 30	30-49	50 and over
Managers and executives	33.3	41.5	43.0
Other professionals	33.0	34.8	37.1
Senior health professionals	33.3	<b>47.5</b>	42.7
Teachers	19.5	31.9	<b>37.6</b>
Other technicians and associate professionals	28.5	33.9	36.0
Technicians	18.4	30.4	28.5
Health technicians and associate professionals	25.0	30.7	35.5
Clerical support workers	25.5	31.3	29.4
Other personal services occupations	30.6	34.5	30.2
Sales occupations	32.9	32.9	35.5
Personal care occupations	27.0	35.3	32.3
All agricultural and allied occupations	18.8	25.7	22.8
Other manual industry and craft trades workers	20.9	25.0	24.9
Manual building trades	30.2	28.5	34.0
Operators and assembly workers	19.5	20.0	26.9
Mobile plant and vehicle drivers	28.9	33.7	27.5
Other unskilled occupations	20.5	23.9	28.6
Cleaners and domestic helpers	24.7	23.7	26.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>26.7</b>	<b>31.6</b>	<b>32.1</b>

Table 4 shows for part-time employees the proportion of each age group wanting to work more hours. Occupations with too small a sample size are not included in the table. These figures give a measure of the share of involuntary part-time in the various occupations.



Table 4 Proportion of part-time workers wanting to work more, by age group  
(employees, EU27)

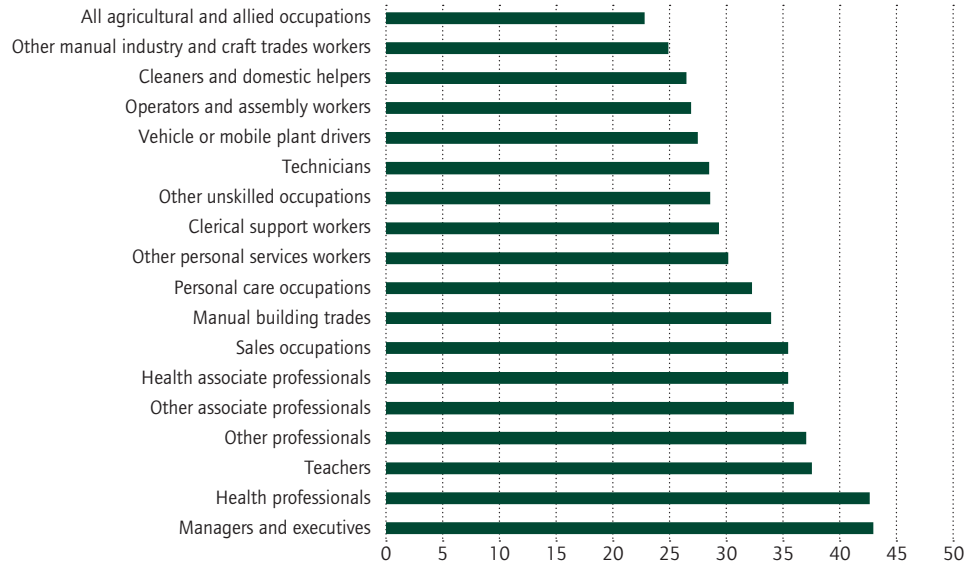
	Under 30	30-49	50 and over
Managers and executives	ns	27.1	ns
Other professionals	ns	31.1	ns
Senior health professionals	ns	24.8	ns
Teachers	42.7	21.7	20.3
Other technicians and associate professionals	35.2	27.1	29.3
Technicians	ns	35.6	ns
Health technicians and associate professionals	ns	25.9	20.0
Clerical support workers	59.3	29.3	24.2
Other personal services occupations	56.1	53.2	35.2
Sales occupations	49.7	41.7	35.8
Personal care occupations	59	34.1	31.5
Other manual industry and craft trades workers	ns	50.0	ns
Other unskilled occupations	54.1	61.8	ns
Cleaners and domestic helpers	59.1	53.2	41.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>50.8</b>	<b>35.6</b>	<b>29.8</b>

NS = not significant (insufficient sample size)

Where the conditions for employees aged 50 and over to have a longer career are concerned, therefore, it is clear that a discernible proportion of over-50s working full-time would like to work fewer hours. This helps inform thinking about desired working and employment conditions when entering the final career years. The data in Figure 25 are those in the third column of Table 3, but shown as a chart for clarity's sake. It will be seen that a significant proportion of full-time employees aged 50 and over in each occupational group would like to work fewer hours in proportions ranging from just over 4 in 10 to just over 2 in 10 employees according to occupation.

To conclude this section on attitudes to the later years of working life, some seemingly counter-intuitive findings engage the attention. Fears of an adverse health impact of work are not the sole preserve of occupations known to be "physically demanding" – and male-dominated – but also affect the more female-dominated health professionals and technicians and associate professionals, personal services occupations other than sales and personal care, and even technicians and teachers. Likewise, health associate professionals score poorly in relation to the prospect of still being able to do the same job at 60. In many occupations, doubt about keeping going until 60 takes hold between 45 and 49 at an age when key decisions are taken about career wind-down. Finally, there is a close correlation between the desire to work less when approaching retirement and working full or part-time. Among full-time employees aged 50 and over, the desire to work fewer hours is most prevalent among professionals and technicians and associate professionals.

Figure 25 Proportion of workers aged 50 and over employed full time wanting to work less, by occupation (employees, EU27)



## 6. Summary and conclusions

An occupational category analysis of the EWCS 2010 survey results affords insights into the age/work relationship. The 18 occupational categories considered in this working document help towards a more forensic assessment of the findings and conclusions on changes in the conditions of employment and work over a working life.

The eight indicators used to characterize the quality of employment and work can distinguish a number of “risk groups”. One is medium- or un-skilled manual occupations: the manual building, industry and craft trades, operators and assembly workers, mobile plant and vehicle drivers, cleaners and domestic helpers and other unskilled occupations. They are among those most exposed to painful positions, work at high speeds, lack of discretion in work, lack of social support and lack of career prospects, but – drivers aside – are less exposed to work-life balance problems. These exposures continue with age, albeit abating after the age of 50. A second risk group consists of service workers: sales occupations, personal care and personal services and, to a lesser degree, health associate professionals. They are less consistently exposed to poor working conditions than the first group, but have a higher frequency of work-life balance problems. Health associate professionals are better protected than other categories in terms of ageing. The occupational category analysis also reveals that certain occupations such as teachers, technicians and health professionals face a number of specific – sometimes acute – problems despite not being risk groups in the same way as the first.

These initial findings rebound on employees’ assessments of the sustainability of their job as they grow older. Occupations in the first risk group cited are more concerned about their declining general health with age and a high prevalence of back and sleep disorders, sometimes onsetting even before the age of 50. They are also more dissatisfied with their working conditions, and this diminishes little with age. With the exception of the building trades, their psychological well-being deteriorates with age. In the second risk group, general health or overall satisfaction with working conditions are less of an issue; rather, sustainability of work is undermined by specific problems (backache, insomnia), fairly middling scores for psychological well-being after the age of 50 and evidence of dissatisfaction with working conditions among the under-50s in sales occupations, personal care and other personal services. Here again, the occupational category analysis flags up warning signs for non-risk-group

occupations: backache and sleep disorders among health professionals, sleep disorders among teachers and senior managers, for example.

Assessments of the negative health impacts of work are not uniform within the two risk groups. In the first, cleaners, domestic helpers and other unskilled occupations differ from the other occupations through a significantly lower proportion of workers who think their work is harming their health. In the second, health associate professionals and non-sales-related personal services and personal care occupations express significantly higher levels of concern.

On the ability to be doing the same job at 60, the first risk group has the lowest scores, apart from mobile plant and vehicle drivers, followed by the second risk group discounting sales occupations.

Working time preferences are not congruent with the risk group boundaries. The highest proportions of employees wanting to work less after the age of 50 are found among professionals, especially in the health care occupations (senior and associate professionals), teachers, managers and executives. The full-time/part-time distinction is more of a determining factor – part-time employees' aspirations reflect the extent of involuntary part-time, which is particularly high among the under-30s but does not dwindle with age, at least in occupations where part-time employment is widespread.

To conclude, the wide range of situations and challenges faced by different occupations counsel extreme caution as regards policies to extend working life for all older workers without distinction. This diversity must be factored into the arrangements made to deliver European policy goals of increasing the employment rates of older workers and raising the actual age of retirement. Moreover, the responsibility for improving working and employment conditions in the final career years also falls to employers and calls for innovative human resources management practices. The root causes of the problems faced by workers aged 50 and over – be it ill health, work organization or expectations of work – often arise in the years before.

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