



Low-qualified workers in Europe

	Introduction
Part 1 – Employment situation of low-qualified workers	
	Quantitative aspects
	Characteristics of low-qualified workers' jobs
	Participation in training
Part 2 – Policies to assist and support low-qualified workers	
	Improving access to employment
	Training measures
	Role of social partners
	Take-up of training opportunities
	Conclusions
	Bibliography
	Annex: Country codes

This report is available in electronic format only.

In general, people in Europe who have only a basic level of education are disadvantaged in three ways: their employment options are limited, they tend to be restricted to certain types of jobs and they have fewer opportunities to participate in training than people with more education. Current policies are geared towards ensuring that fewer people drop out of the school system with inadequate qualifications. However, it is equally important to ensure that those with low qualifications can access the labour market and find stable, decent employment. The social partners can make an important contribution in this regard.

Introduction

Study objectives

This study aims first to obtain a fuller insight into the employment of low-qualified workers in different European countries and into the jobs that they do. The secondary aim is to examine the various policies which have been put in place to improve the situation of the workers concerned in various ways, whether through the provision of education and training to increase their formal qualifications or through arrangements for recognising the skills and competences that they might have acquired by means other than completing formal programmes of education or **vocational training**. These means include, in particular, the certification of learning by doing or experience on the job, which serves not only to raise the status of the workers in question but also to widen the job opportunities open to them.

Sources

The study is based on two main sources of information. One is the data compiled by the European Labour Force Survey (LFS), which cover all European Union Member States and a number of other countries, on the employment characteristics of people with differing levels of educational attainment or qualifications, on the extent to which they are employed rather than unemployed or economically inactive, and on the types of work that they do. A selection of these LFS data is available online on [Eurofound](#).

The other source is the information provided by national correspondents of the **European Working Conditions Observatory (EWCO)** in response to a set of questions on the jobs performed by low-qualified workers, the policies directed at assisting them, the opportunities open to them to improve their situation, their willingness to pursue such opportunities and the actions taken by the social partners to help them.

Definition

Throughout the study, low-qualified workers are defined as those whose educational attainment level is less than upper secondary level, that is, less than ISCED 3, according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). Thus, it includes people who have only basic educational levels (ISCED 0–2) – in other words, those who have not successfully completed at least three years of education or formal vocational training after finishing compulsory schooling. This is the conventional definition adopted for comparative analysis and, indeed, the one commonly used in European countries when examining the situation of the workers concerned. However, in a few countries, low-qualified workers are sometimes defined in terms of those employed in jobs requiring low skill levels, particularly when considering wage levels or the terms and conditions of employment. Nevertheless, even in these countries, it is recognised that

This report is available in electronic format only.

low-skilled jobs are not always occupied by workers with low educational levels – and indeed, vice versa. Thus, if the concern is with people, then the relevant focus is on those with low qualifications rather than on jobs that can be performed without needing to have high skill levels.

In addition, it is also recognised that skills are not adequately measured by formal qualifications alone. Skills can equally be obtained through learning by doing and experience in the workplace, so that people may be capable of performing a job requiring a relatively high skill level without educational qualifications. Indeed, the fact that in many countries a significant proportion of people employed in some high-level jobs do not have a university degree or the equivalent, or even upper secondary education, is testimony to this. It is difficult, however, to measure the ability to do such jobs independently of educational attainment levels or, more generally, to devise indicators of skills and competences which are not based on educational qualifications.

At the same time, the relative number of people without high-level qualifications who are employed in high-level jobs is tending to diminish over time throughout Europe, which almost certainly reflects the increasing difficulty of performing these jobs effectively without such qualifications. This, in turn, reflects the changing character of such jobs and the greater technical knowledge that they require. The same is true of lower level jobs, such as those for skilled manual workers or most office jobs, where it increasingly seems that an upper secondary level qualification is a minimum requirement for being able to perform the tasks involved.

Accordingly, it seems that the job opportunities open to people without qualifications beyond basic schooling are declining markedly as time goes on, which is why the situation of the people in question both in the job market and in society more generally is becoming a matter of growing concern across Europe. The purpose of this study, as indicated above, is to examine the nature of this situation and the response of governments and the social partners, as well as the individuals themselves, to it.

Outline of analysis

The analysis is divided into two main parts: the first examines the main aspects of the employment situation of those with low qualifications and how these aspects have tended to change over recent years in different parts of Europe; the second part considers the action which has been taken by governments and social partners to improve this situation of the people concerned.

The first part begins by examining the quantitative aspects of low-qualified people in Europe by comparing the relative number of low-qualified men and women across Europe, their employment status and whether they work as an employee or are self-employed or an unpaid family helper. The changes in this division over the period between 2000 and 2007 are also explored.

Thereafter, the study analyses the characteristics of the jobs occupied by low-qualified workers. Occupations and economic sectors of activity in which low-qualified workers are employed are assessed, as well as their hours of work and the extent to which they tend to have fixed-term contracts of employment. This section ends by considering the relative wage levels of low-qualified workers in different countries and the degree of overlap between low-skilled jobs and low-qualified workers.

The report then discusses the provision of training given to and taken up by low-qualified workers.

The second part of the study examines the policies in place in the different European countries aiming to support persons with low qualifications, which tend to focus on those who are unemployed or economically inactive, and the opportunities that exist for low-qualified workers

to improve their situation. Following the structure from the first part, policies to improve access to the labour market are first discussed, followed by strategies to provide training for low-qualified workers.

In addition, the report examines the action taken by the social partners to assist these workers. It also reviews the research that has been conducted into the attitudes of the people concerned and their willingness to help themselves, such as by participating in programmes to increase their skill levels and the jobs open to them. The report ends with some concluding remarks.

Part 1 – Employment situation of low-qualified workers

The data on low-qualified workers are divided into subgroups that enable some comparisons. One division is made between those aged 25–49 years and those aged 50–64 years. Another division is between men and women, and a further breakdown is between the different countries, comprising the 27 EU Member States (EU27) and Norway. Comparisons between these groups, or combinations of groups, are made throughout the text and figures. Data from both 2000 and 2007 are also available and therefore comparisons over time can be made.

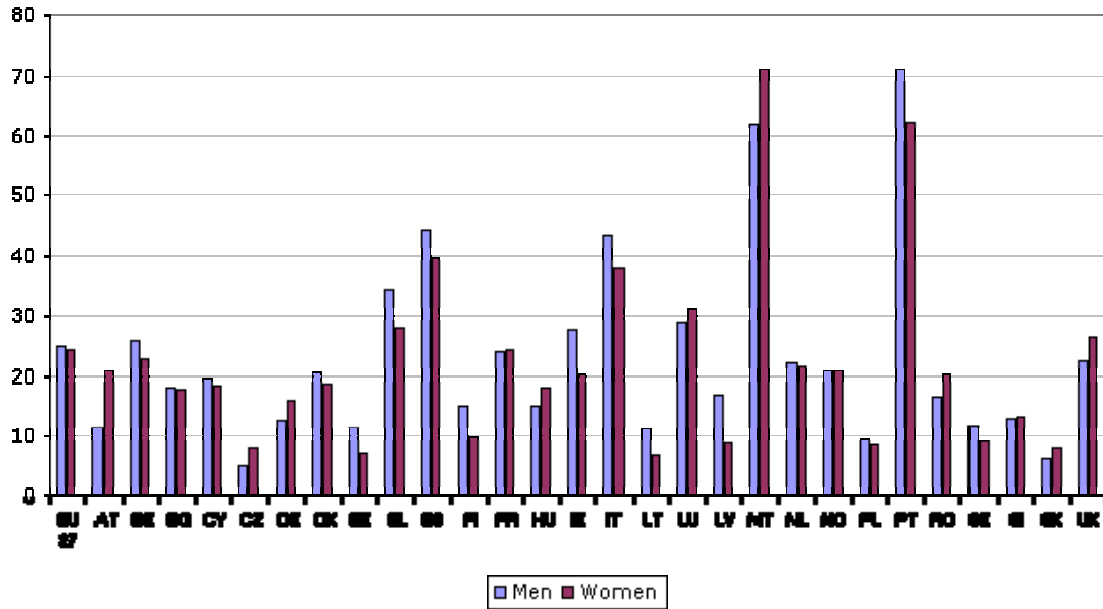
Quantitative aspects

The first aspect to explore in relation to the employment situation of low-qualified workers is to what extent this group is likely to be active in the labour market and to what extent these workers are able to find a job. This section also considers the prevalence of self-employment among low-qualified people.

As explained, persons with low qualifications are typically defined across the EU as those with no educational qualifications beyond basic schooling. They are, therefore, those who have attained at most lower secondary level education, which means that they have not undertaken education or vocational training courses – or at least those of three or more years' duration – after completing compulsory schooling. This definition is adopted throughout the present study.

The relative proportion of men and women with low qualifications, as defined in this way, varies markedly across Europe. It is particularly small in many of the new Member States (NMS) that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, although it is especially large in Malta, where the great majority of people of working age have no education beyond basic schooling (Figures 1 and 2). This is also the case in Portugal. The relative share throughout Europe has tended to decline considerably over time, as reflected in the much greater proportion of people with low qualifications among those aged 50 years and over than among young people who have just completed their education. The decline has been particularly large among women, who used to account for the majority of those with low qualifications but who no longer do so among younger age groups.

Figure 1: Low-qualified men and women aged 25–49 years, 2007 (%)

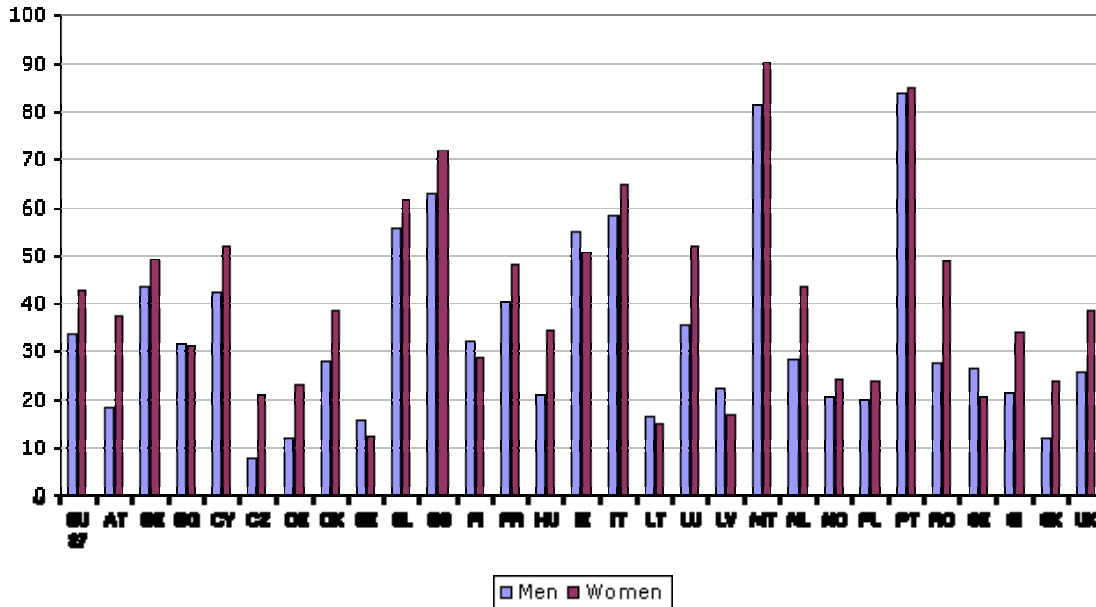


Low-qualified men and women aged 25–49 years, 2007 (%)

Note: See Annex for a full list of country codes.

Source: European Labour Force Survey

Figure 2: Low-qualified men and women aged 50–64 years, 2007 (%)



Low-qualified men and women aged 50–64 years, 2007 (%)

Source: European Labour Force Survey

In 17 of the 28 countries covered (27 EU Member States plus Norway), the proportion of women aged 25–49 years with low qualifications was less than for men. The difference was especially wide in Latvia and Portugal. In both Austria and Malta, however, the opposite was the case and many more women than men were low qualified.

In all countries, the proportion of those aged 25–49 years with only basic schooling was less than for those aged 50–64 years – in most cases, substantially less. This difference was especially large in Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain, even though the proportion remains higher than elsewhere in the EU.

The larger reduction in the proportion of low-qualified women than men is illustrated by the fact that, among those aged 50–64 years, there are only seven countries where the proportion of women in this age group with only basic schooling was smaller than among men in 2007, compared with the 17 countries where this was the case for the 25–49 age group. In 11 of the 28 countries, the proportion of women aged 50–64 years with only basic schooling was over 10 percentage points greater than for men. These include five of the new Member States – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia – in all of which the proportion of women aged 25–49 years with only basic schooling was also higher than for men, although by much less so.

This finding seems to contradict the belief in equality of educational opportunity between men and women under the former Communist regime. However, it reflects the view among women, as reported in the Czech Republic, that they did not need education as much as men did because they were the ones who would be looking after young children and who, in any case, would be guaranteed employment once they returned to work. On the other hand, in the three Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the proportion of women in the 50–64 age group with only basic schooling was lower than for men, which suggests that the attitude of women to continuing their education beyond compulsory schooling was not the same in these countries.

Employment rates

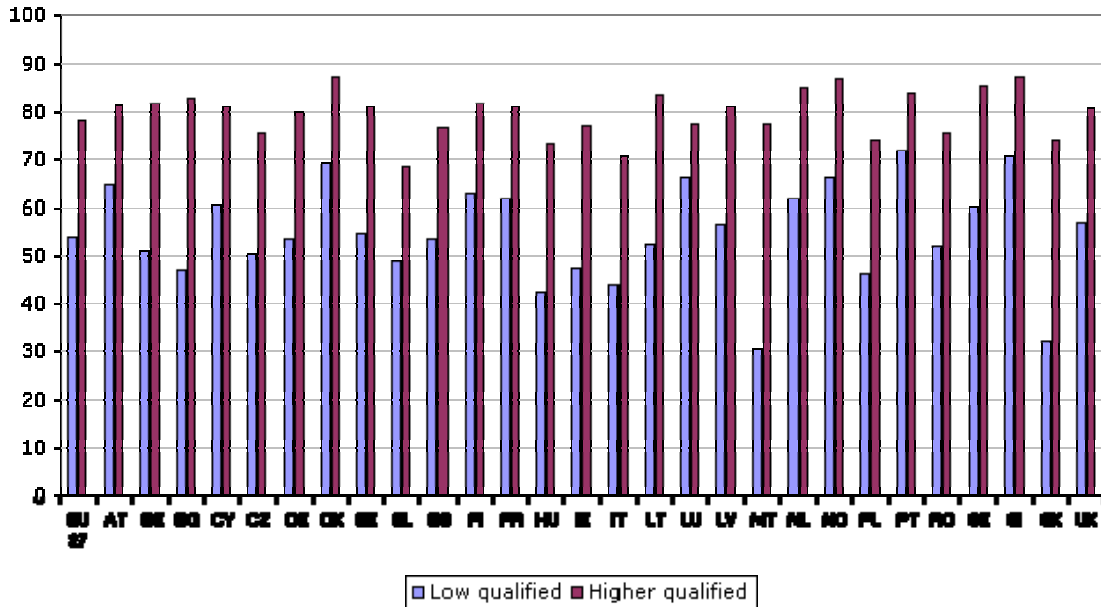
The employment rate of low-qualified persons – that is, the proportion of those of working age who are in work – varies markedly across Europe, from 77%–78% of those aged 25–49 years in Denmark and Luxembourg in 2007 to only 50% in Hungary and just 33% in Slovakia. These figures, however, need to be related to the employment rates of those with higher level qualifications in order to gain an impression of the extent of disadvantage experienced by the people concerned.

In all 28 of the countries covered, the employment rates of low-qualified workers are lower than those of the rest of the population. Indeed, in all but three countries – Greece, Luxembourg and Portugal – the proportion of those aged 25–49 years in employment was over 10 percentage points lower for people with only basic schooling than for those with upper secondary or third-level qualifications. In Greece and Portugal, the relatively small differences in these employment rates reflect the structure of economic activity and the fact that low-skilled jobs – such as in agriculture, the textiles industry or tourism – account for a relatively large proportion of the total.

The extent of the difference in employment rates between low-qualified and higher qualified workers was particularly large in Bulgaria and Malta, as well as in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. In the last three countries, most notably in Slovakia, this reflects the small proportion of people with only basic schooling, who, accordingly, tend to have other characteristics which affect their access to employment or their willingness to take a job, as well as having a low level of education. In particular, a significant number are of Roma origin, many of whom had difficulties accessing education. Furthermore, many of them work in the informal economy and might not report to the Labour Force Survey that they are in employment.

In Malta, the difference in employment rates is concentrated among women, with only just over 30% of low-qualified women aged 25–49 years being in employment, which is 47 percentage points less than the rate of those with higher educational levels. This gap represents a much bigger difference than that for men (Figure 3 compared with Figure 4).

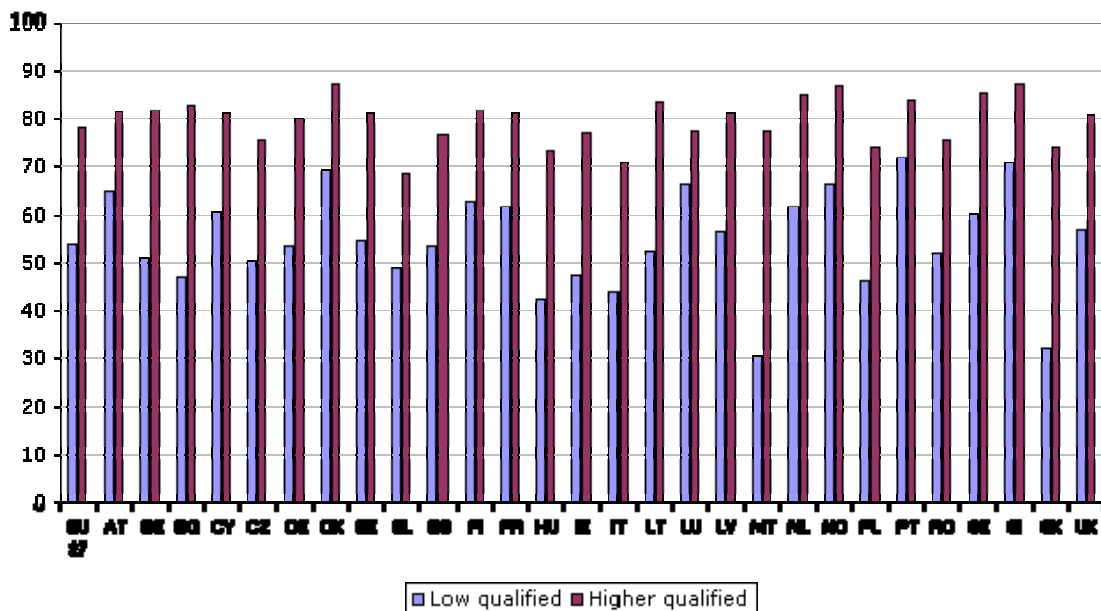
Figure 3: Employment rates of women aged 25–49 years, by qualification level (%)



Employment rates of women aged 25–49 years, by qualification level (%)

Source: European Labour Force Survey

Figure 4: Employment rates of men aged 25–49 years, by qualification level (%)



Employment rates of men aged 25–49 years, by qualification level (%)

Source: European Labour Force Survey

While the situation in Malta is extreme in this regard, the employment rates of women with low qualifications are much lower than for men throughout the EU, with the exceptions of the Czech

Republic and Slovakia, where the difference is not very great. In all countries, apart from these two Member States, therefore, women with low qualifications are at more of a disadvantage than men in terms of access to employment. This reflects in part the fact that the responsibility for caring for children ultimately tends to fall on women. In cases where the earnings potential of women is relatively limited – low-qualified workers being the prime example – it may not be worthwhile for them to be in employment because their earnings do not cover the cost of childcare. Equally, this gender gap reflects the fact that, where cultural traditions run counter to women being in paid employment, such as in southern Italy or parts of Greece and Spain – or, indeed, in Malta – these customs tend to apply most especially to women with low educational levels.

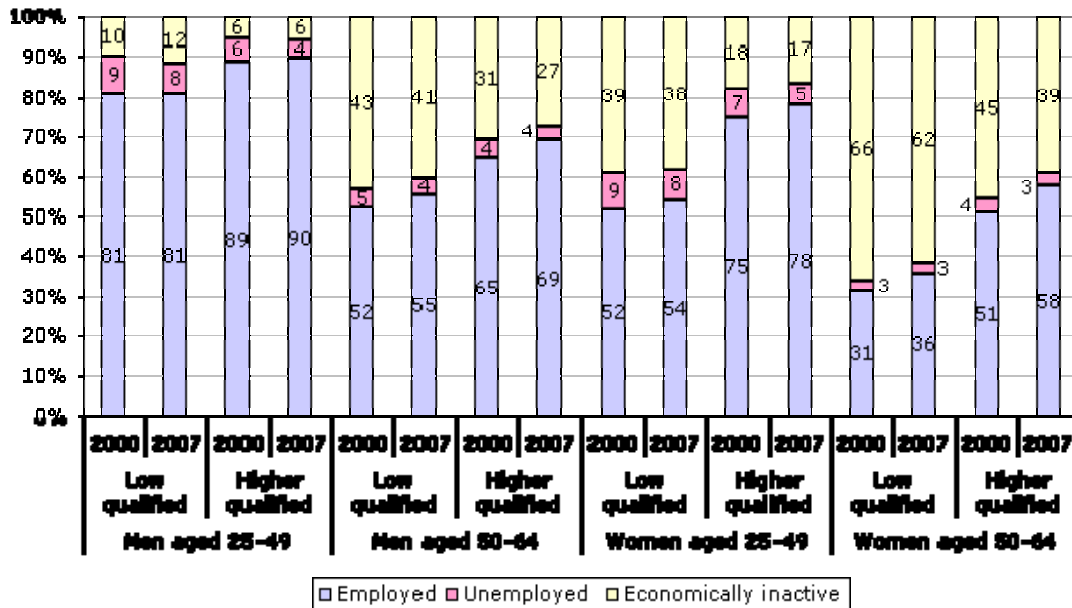
In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, by contrast, both men and women with low qualifications have a low employment rate, which is almost certainly a reflection of the relatively large proportion of them who belong to an ethnic minority. A similar situation exists in Hungary for the same reason, albeit to a lesser extent.

For those aged 50–64 years, who are either retired or nearing retirement age, the proportion of low-qualified people in employment is also smaller than for those more qualified, in most countries again substantially so. Only in Cyprus, Greece, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia – all countries where employment in the agricultural sector is especially important for this age group – was the difference less than 15 percentage points. In all five of these Member States, the difference was especially small for men.

By contrast, as in the case of those aged 25–49 years, the employment rate of low-qualified workers aged 50–64 years was particularly low in relation to those with higher qualifications in Malta and Slovakia, in both cases for the same reasons as for those aged 25–49 years; it was also very low in Hungary, Italy and Lithuania.

Overall, the gap in employment rates between low-qualified people and the rest of the working age population has not changed much in recent years. In the EU as a whole, therefore, this gap was the same among those aged 25–49 years in 2007 as it was seven years earlier in 2000 (Figure 5). Indeed, it narrowed in only 12 of the 28 countries covered and only in Latvia did it narrow by more than three percentage points. For those aged 50–64 years, the gap widened in the EU as a whole, although it narrowed in 16 of the 28 countries; in this case, it narrowed by three percentage points or more in nine countries – Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovakia and Spain.

Figure 5: Men and women, by employment status and qualification level, EU, 2000 and 2007 (%)



Men and women, by employment status and qualification level, EU, 2000 and 2007 (%)

Note: Some of the data may add up to slightly more or less than 100%, due to rounding of data.

Source: European Labour Force Survey

Unemployment

Most of those with low qualifications who are not in employment are economically inactive rather than unemployed – that is, they are not actively looking for a job. On average, only about a quarter of those aged 25–49 years who were not working were recorded as being unemployed in 2007, in the sense of being available for work and actively looking for a job. This still, however, represented almost 8% of those in this age group, implying an unemployment rate – as conventionally measured, in other words, as a proportion of those economically active – of over 10%, which amounts to more than twice the rate for the higher qualified population. In all countries, albeit only marginally so in Greece, the unemployment rate of low-qualified workers in the 25–49 age group was higher than for those more qualified. As would be expected, the unemployment rate among these workers was particularly high in countries in which the employment level was low; thus, the unemployment rate of low-qualified workers aged 25–49 years stood at over 50% in Slovakia, 23% in the Czech Republic, 19% in Hungary and more than 18% in Poland. In each case, this proportion was considerably higher than the unemployment rate for higher qualified workers. Nevertheless, even in these countries, most of the low-qualified people not in work were economically inactive rather than unemployed.

In most countries, the unemployment rate among women with low qualifications was higher than for men, as is the case among those who are higher qualified. More specifically, in the EU, unemployment among women with low qualifications aged 25–49 years averaged 12.5% in 2007,

compared with 9% for low-qualified men; this gender gap is almost three times that for higher qualified workers.

In addition, the risk of unemployed people being out of work for a long period of time is especially high for low-qualified workers. Although the difference is not very great on average, in several countries, a significant disparity emerges in this regard. More specifically, at EU level, the proportion of unemployed people with low qualifications in the 25–49 age group who had been out of work for a year or more was only some five percentage points larger than for the rest of the unemployed people of the same age: just under 51% compared with just under 46%. However, the difference was much greater in a number of countries – most especially, in the Czech Republic, Ireland, Malta and Slovakia. In this last Member State, over 90% of those unemployed among the low-qualified labour force had been out of work for a year or more in 2007.

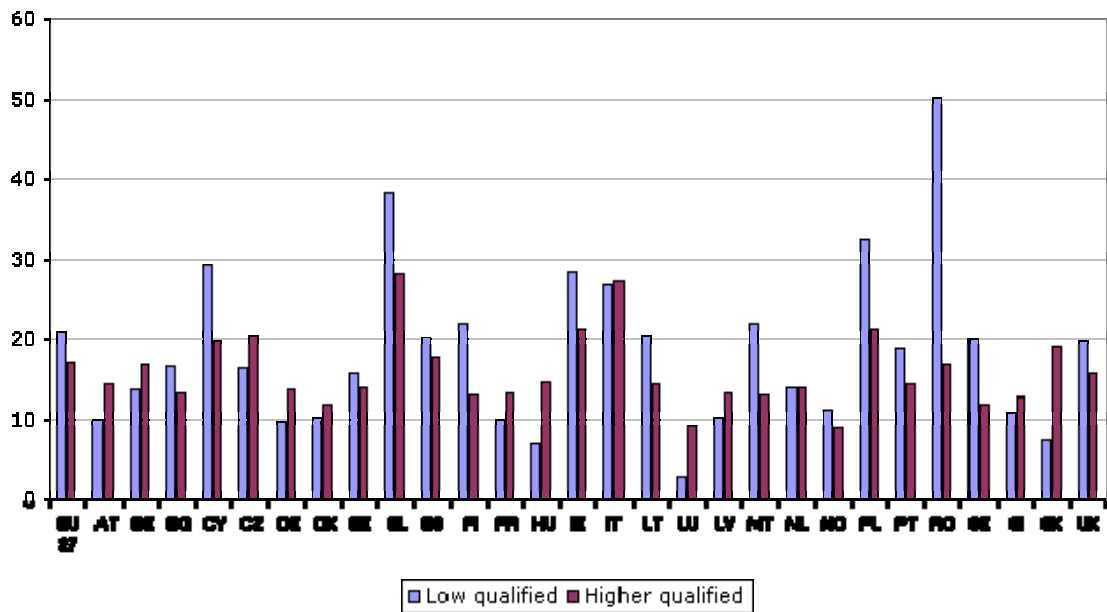
Self-employment

Perhaps surprisingly, more of the low-qualified workforce in the EU is self-employed than is the case among those with higher educational levels. In 2007, some 17% of people aged 25–49 years with only basic schooling and in work were self-employed, compared with almost 13.5% of those with higher qualifications. This was even more the case among the older generation: 24% of low-qualified persons aged 50–64 years in work are self-employed, compared with almost 18% of those more qualified.

A significant part of the reason lies in the relatively high numbers of self-employed people in the agricultural sector. The proportion of low-qualified workers who are self-employed is, therefore, particularly large in countries where this sector remains economically important – Greece, Poland and Romania – most notably among those aged 50–64 years.

The proportion of low-qualified men aged 25–49 years who are self-employed among their working peers is higher than is the case for low-qualified women in all countries with the sole exception of Luxembourg (Figures 6 and 7). Nevertheless, the proportion of low-qualified women in this age group who were self-employed in 2007 was also relatively high in Greece, Poland and Romania, standing at over 20% of those in work.

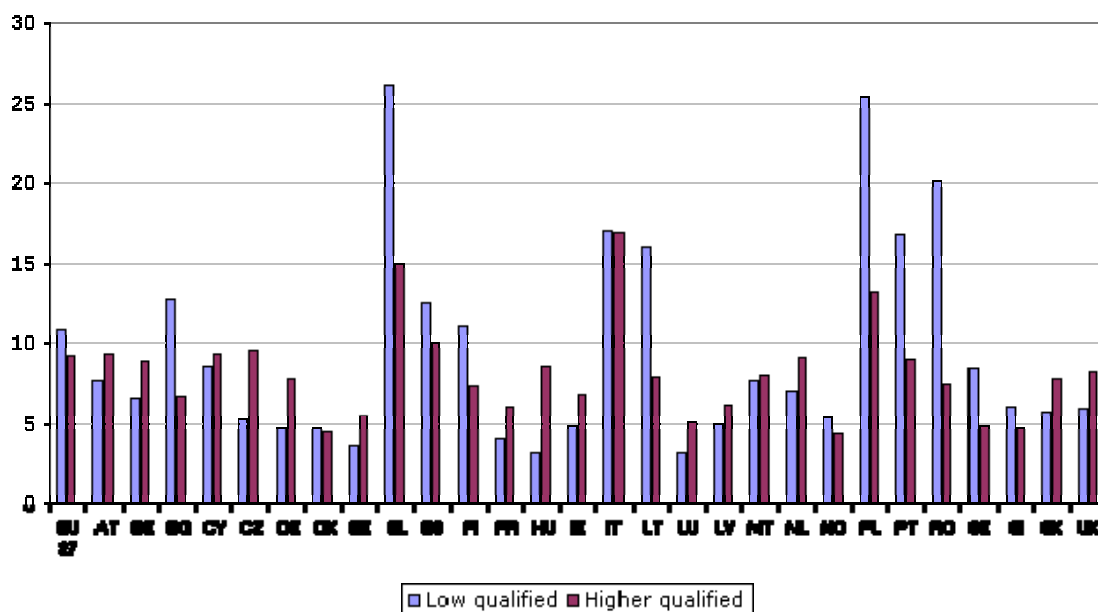
Figure 6: Self-employed men aged 25–49 years, by qualification level, 2007 (% of male workforce)



Self-employed men aged 25–49 years, by qualification level, 2007 (% of male workforce)

Source: European Labour Force Survey

Figure 7: Self-employed women aged 25–49 years, by qualification level, 2007 (% of female workforce)



Self-employed women aged 25–49 years, by qualification level, 2007 (% of female workforce)

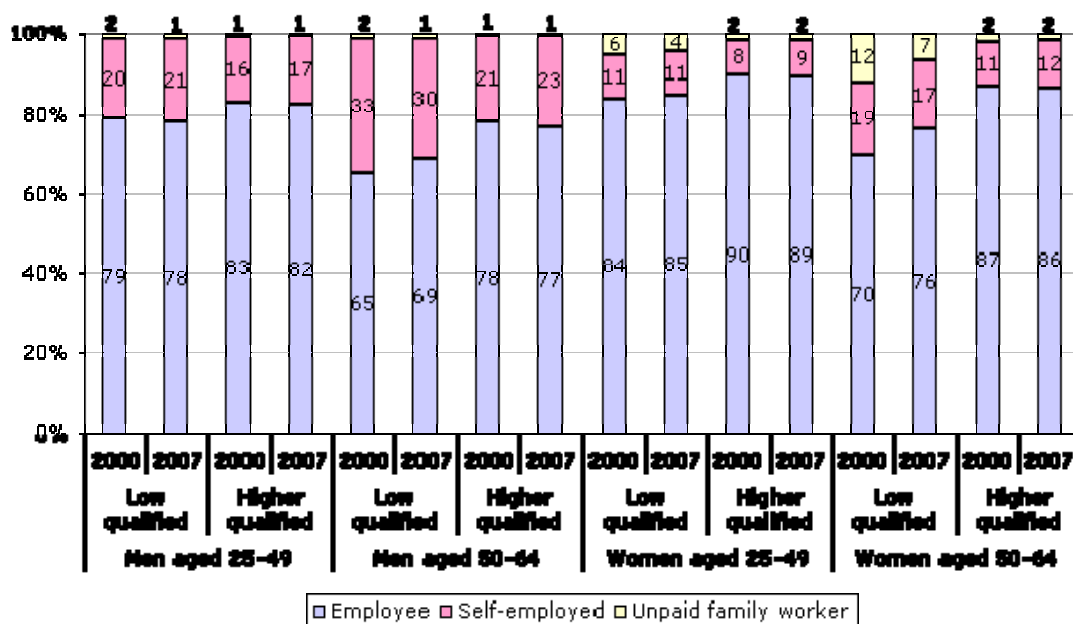
Source: European Labour Force Survey

Many of the low-qualified workers who are employed in agriculture in these three countries – Poland and Romania, especially – are subsistence farmers who produce little or nothing for the market. Accordingly, a significant number of their spouses and/or other members of their families are categorised as unpaid family workers, which to a large extent is why the proportion of women classed as self-employed is smaller than for men. In Greece and Poland, some 15%–20% of low-qualified women aged 25–49 years in work were categorised as unpaid family workers while, in Romania, this proportion increased to 45%. Among those aged 50–64 years, the figures were even higher: 22%–24% in Greece and Poland, and 53% in Romania.

As a result, in Romania, only just over a third of both men and women aged 25–49 years with low qualifications were employees in paid jobs in 2007; furthermore, this was the case for fewer than 20% of those aged 50–64 years.

The proportion of self-employed people among the low-qualified working population has tended to increase slightly over time in the EU as a whole among those aged 25–49 years, from 16% to 17% in the period between 2000 and 2007, the increase being largely concentrated among men (Figure 8). The gap in relation to the higher qualified workforce, however, has hardly changed. Among those aged 50–64 years, the proportion of self-employed people among the low-qualified working population has tended to decline, from 27% to 24% between 2000 and 2007; in this case, it has also decreased relative to those more qualified. While in both Greece and Poland, the proportion of self-employed people among those who are low qualified in both age groups declined over the seven-year period, in Romania, it remained much the same among those aged 50–64 years and increased significantly among those aged 25–49 years.

Figure 8: Men and women, by professional status and occupational level, EU, 2000 and 2007 (%)



Men and women, by professional status and occupational level, EU, 2000 and 2007 (%)

Note: Some of the data may add up to slightly more or less than 100%, due to rounding of data.

Source: European Labour Force Survey

The proportion of those employed as unpaid family workers also declined across the EU over the seven-year period, especially among women aged 50–64 years, from 12% to 7%. The decline was particularly evident among low-qualified women in Greece (from 37% to 24% in the case of those aged 50–64 years) as well as in Latvia (from 11% to 2% among men and women aged 25–49 years). In Poland and Romania, however, the proportion of low-qualified women employed as unpaid family workers in the 25–49 age group increased over this period.

Characteristics of low-qualified workers' jobs

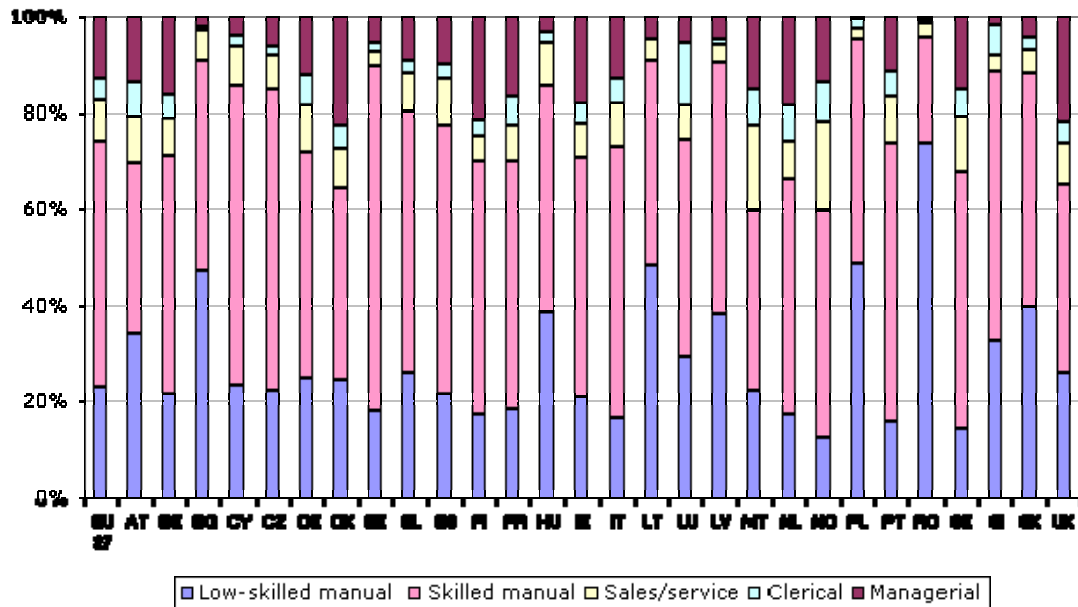
The previous section described how low-qualified workers have a less positive situation in the labour market in terms of economic activity and employment rate. This section explores the characteristics of the jobs that are actually occupied by low-qualified workers.

Occupational profile

Not surprisingly, most of the low-qualified people in work are employed in occupations requiring a relatively low level of education. In the EU, almost two thirds (64%) of those in work in the 25–49 age group with only basic schooling were employed in manual jobs in 2007: 28% in low-skilled jobs and 36% in skilled or semi-skilled work. On the other hand, 6% of these workers were employed in managerial positions and about 5% as technicians or assistant professionals. In the 50–64 age group, slightly fewer were employed as manual workers (62%) and slightly more as managers (8%).

The types of job filled by low-qualified workers vary between men and women. Almost three quarters of men in employment aged 25–49 years with low qualifications worked in manual jobs; just over half of all men in this educational category held skilled and semi-skilled jobs. Among women in this age group, just under a half were doing manual work, with some 35% of all of the women in low-skilled manual jobs; meanwhile, over a quarter (27%) of the low-qualified women were employed in sales and service jobs (Figures 9 and 10).

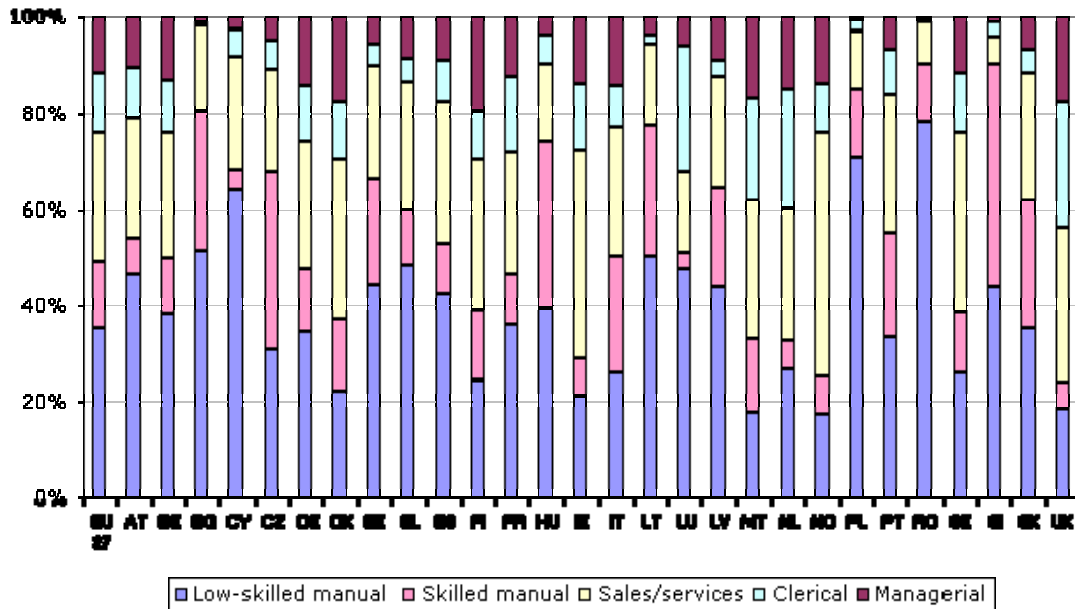
Figure 9: Low-qualified men aged 25–49 years, by occupation type, 2007 (%)



Low-qualified men aged 25–49 years, by occupation type, 2007 (%)

Source: European Labour Force Survey

Figure 10: Low-qualified women aged 25–49 years, by occupation type, 2007 (%)



Low-qualified women aged 25–49 years, by occupation type, 2007 (%)

Source: European Labour Force Survey

Marked differences also arise between Member States. In all of the NMS except Malta, more than 85% of men aged 25–49 years with low qualifications were employed in manual jobs. In the 15 Member States before EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007 (EU15) – the figure was 80% in Greece and over 77% in Spain, but elsewhere between 60% and 75%.

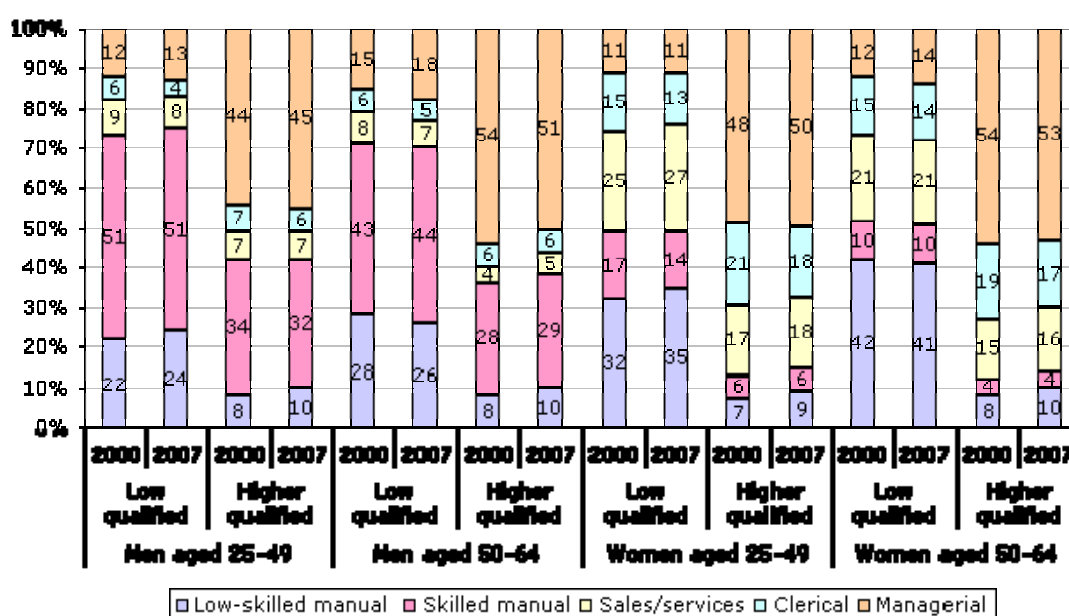
Among women, over 80% of those low qualified in the 25–49 age group were employed in manual jobs in Bulgaria; this proportion reached more than 85% in Poland and over 90% in Romania and Slovenia. By contrast, the proportion was under a third in the Netherlands, under 30% in Ireland and about a quarter in both Norway and the United Kingdom (UK), reflecting in large measure the different structure of economic activity and, in particular, the greater importance of the services sector in these countries. In all four countries, well over half of women in employment with low qualifications worked in sales and service jobs or as clerks or keyboard operators in offices.

The proportion of both men and women employed in manual jobs among those low qualified aged 50–64 years was even higher in most of the NMS, with the proportion for men being about 95% or more in the three Baltic States, while the share for women reached over 90% in Poland and Romania.

All of these proportions are much larger for low-qualified workers than for the rest of the population. In the EU as a whole, only just over 40% of the men aged 25–49 years with higher qualifications in employment worked in manual jobs, while the proportion for men aged 50–64 years was lower still (38%); in both cases, these rates are 32–33 percentage points below the figures for low-qualified workers. For women, the difference was even wider, with fewer than 15% of the more qualified women in both the 25–49 and the 50–64 age groups being employed in manual jobs.

There is little sign of any widespread decline in the proportion of low-qualified workers employed in manual jobs over recent years, despite the decreasing importance of such jobs overall. Between 2000 and 2007, the proportion even increased slightly across the EU as a whole for both men and women in the 25–49 age group and, although a reduction was noted in the case of those aged 50–64 years, it was small (Figure 11). Nevertheless, in six of the 28 countries covered – Austria, Denmark, France, Latvia, Luxembourg and Norway – there was a significant decline of over three percentage points in the proportion of low-qualified men aged 25–49 years employed in manual jobs; the decrease was over 12 percentage points in Denmark. On the other hand, in three countries – Estonia, Romania and the UK – the proportion for men increased by over three percentage points.

Figure 11: Men and women, by occupation type and qualification level, EU, 2000 and 2007 (%)



Men and women, by occupation type and qualification level, EU, 2000 and 2007 (%)

Note: Some of the data may add up to slightly more or less than 100%, due to rounding of data.

Source: European Labour Force Survey

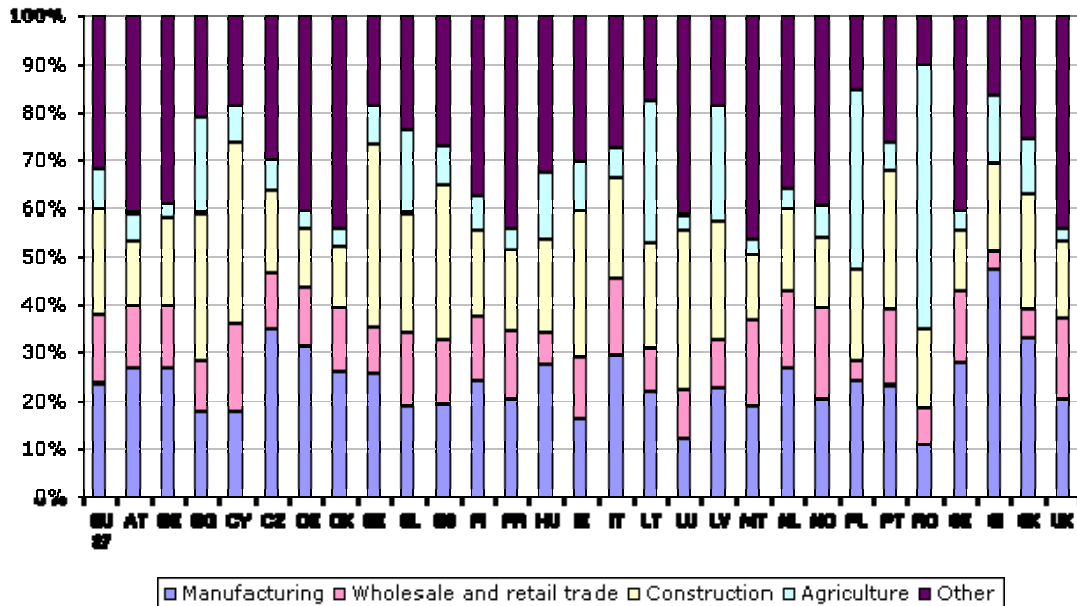
For women in the same age group, the experience was more varied. The proportion of low-qualified women aged 25–49 years employed in manual jobs declined significantly in five of the six countries in which it decreased for men, the exception being France. Moreover, the share for women also decreased significantly in the Czech Republic, Estonia (where it increased for men), Italy and Slovakia. At the same time, the proportion for women increased in five countries – Belgium, Finland, France (where it declined in the case of men), Romania and Sweden.

Sectoral profile

As might be expected, low-qualified workers tend to be largely employed in economic sectors where high levels of education for the most part are not required. Over two thirds of men aged 25–49 years with a low qualification and in employment in the EU worked in just four sectors:

agriculture, manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, and, above all, construction (Figure 12). This proportion was only slightly less for those aged 50–64 years. In both cases, the share was about 16–18 percentage points higher than for more qualified workers.

Figure 12: Low-qualified men aged 25–49 years, by sector, 2007 (%)

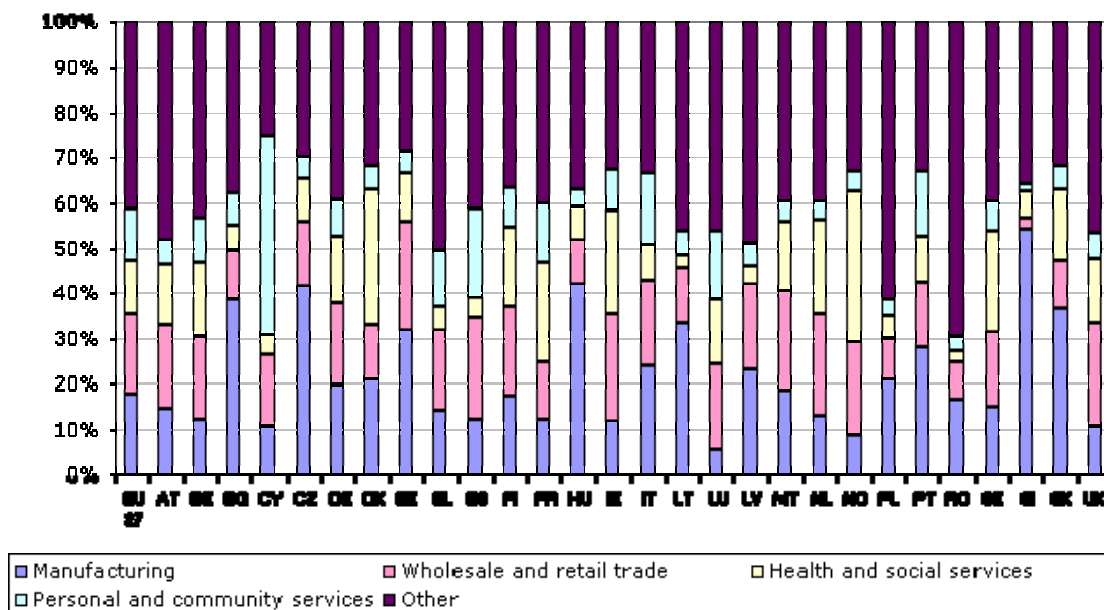


Low-qualified men aged 25–49 years, by sector, 2007 (%)

Source: European Labour Force Survey

The employment of low-qualified women is less concentrated and much more similar to that of higher qualified women. A total of four sectors – manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, health and social services, and personal and community services – accounted for 59% of low-qualified women aged 25–49 years in work in 2007 (Figure 13). This proportion was only seven percentage points more than for higher qualified women.

Figure 13: Low-qualified women aged 25–49 years, by sector, 2007 (%)



Low-qualified women aged 25–49 years, by sector, 2007 (%)

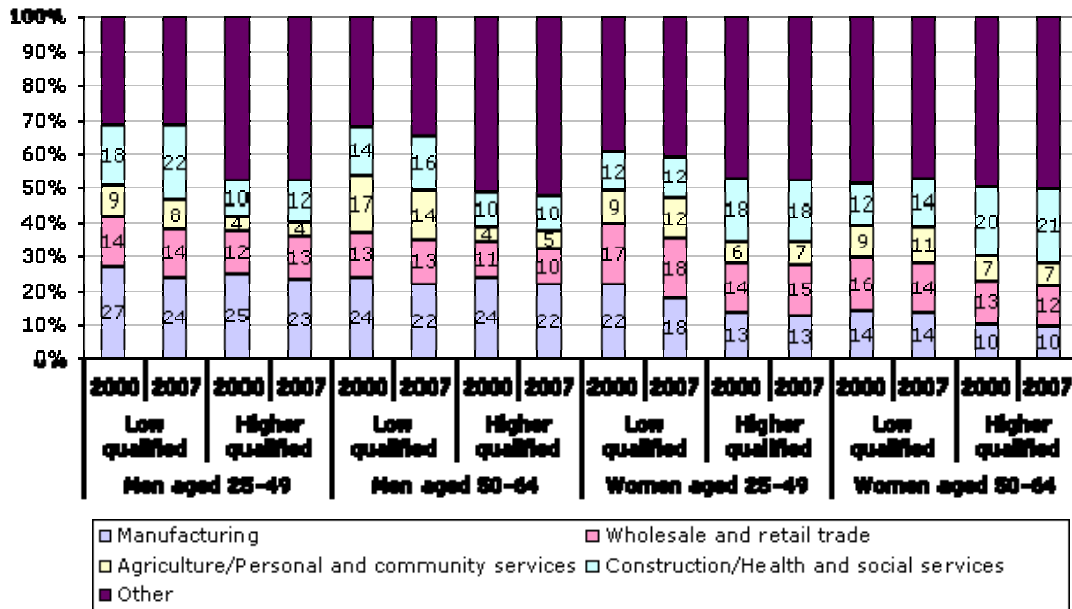
Source: European Labour Force Survey

The concentration of men in the four economic sectors listed was particularly high in countries where either agriculture or construction accounted for a large share of employment: Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania, in the case of agriculture; Cyprus and Estonia in the case of construction, which employs about 38% of low-qualified men aged 25–49 years working in each of these two countries. In the Czech Republic and Slovenia, where manufacturing was particularly important, a much larger proportion of low-qualified men in work than elsewhere was employed in this sector (36% and 48%, respectively).

The sectoral profile of low-qualified women aged 25–49 years shows more variation across countries. In the NMS, a high concentration of these women were working in agriculture in Romania (over 60%) and Poland (40%), in manufacturing in Slovenia (54%), the Czech Republic and Hungary (41%–42% in each case), and in personal services in Cyprus (44%). In the EU15, there was less of a concentration in particular economic sectors, although in Denmark – much more than elsewhere – a significant proportion of low-qualified women were employed in health and social services (30%).

The proportion of low-qualified men employed in the four economic sectors concerned has tended to remain much the same over recent years while the proportion of women has tended to decline slightly, largely because of the decreasing economic importance of manufacturing (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Men and women, by sector and qualification level, EU, 2000 and 2007 (%)



Men and women, by sector and qualification level, EU, 2000 and 2007 (%)

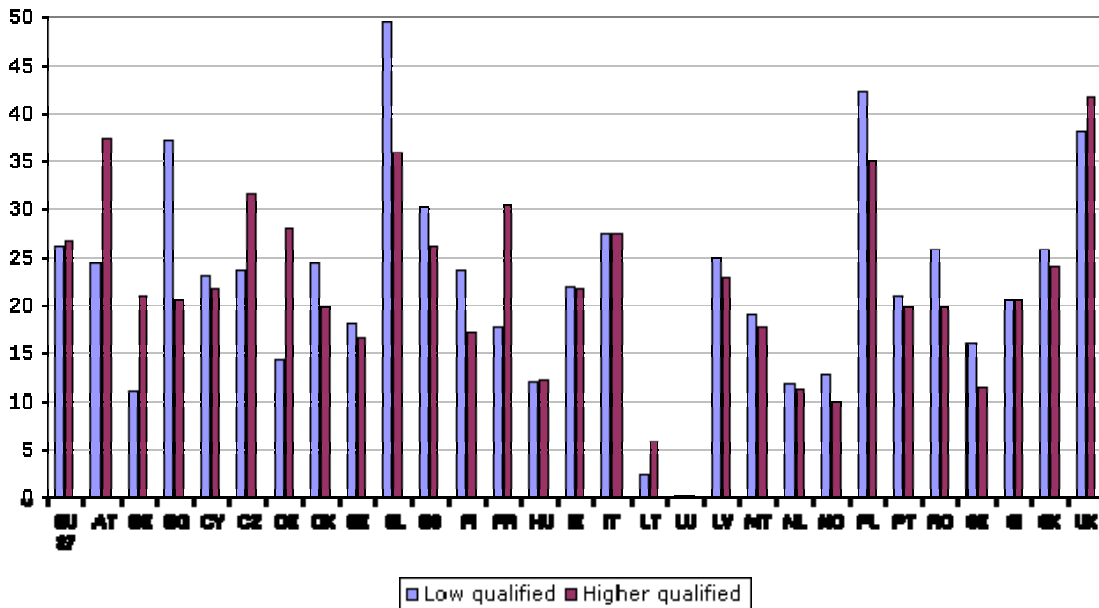
Source: European Labour Force Survey

Working hours

Contrary perhaps to expectations, low-qualified workers do not tend to work longer hours than those more qualified in order to compensate for the lower hourly wage rates that they are likely to be paid. The proportion of both men and women in employment in the EU working 45 hours a week or more was, therefore, much the same (26%–27% for men, 10%–11% for women).

These figures, however, conceal differences between countries. For men aged 25–49 years, in 17 of the 28 countries covered – including, at notable levels, eight NMS, Greece, Portugal, Spain and also three Nordic countries (Finland, Norway and Sweden) – the proportion of men with low qualifications working 45 hours a week or more was greater than for those higher qualified (Figure 15). This partly reflects the relatively large number of men employed in the agricultural sector, where working hours tend to be longer than in other sectors. On the other hand, the data also reflect the relatively large number of highly educated workers employed as managers and professionals in the other countries who work relatively long hours, a significant number of these being self-employed. Self-employed people generally work much longer hours than employees: over half of them work 45 hours a week or longer in many of the countries.

Figure 15: Men aged 25–49 years usually working 45 hours a week or more, by qualification level, 2007 (%)



Men aged 25–49 years usually working 45 hours a week or more, by qualification level, 2007 (%)

Source: European Labour Force Survey

In general, therefore, contrary perhaps to expectations, the tendency in the higher income countries – apart from the three Nordic countries noted above – is for the more highly educated people with relatively high earnings capacity to work longer hours than those who are low educated. There is, accordingly, little sign of people tending to opt to work less and enjoy more leisure time as their incomes increase, which is what economic theory might predict.

The picture is similar for men aged 50–64 years and it is also much the same for women. The evidence suggests, however, that the tendency for a smaller proportion of low-qualified workers to work long hours than those more qualified is a relatively recent occurrence which was not evident in 2000, either for those aged 25–49 years and, more especially, among those aged 50–64 years. For the second age group, therefore, there has been a decline in the proportion of low-qualified men and women working 45 hours a week or more and an increase in the share of higher qualified workers doing so.

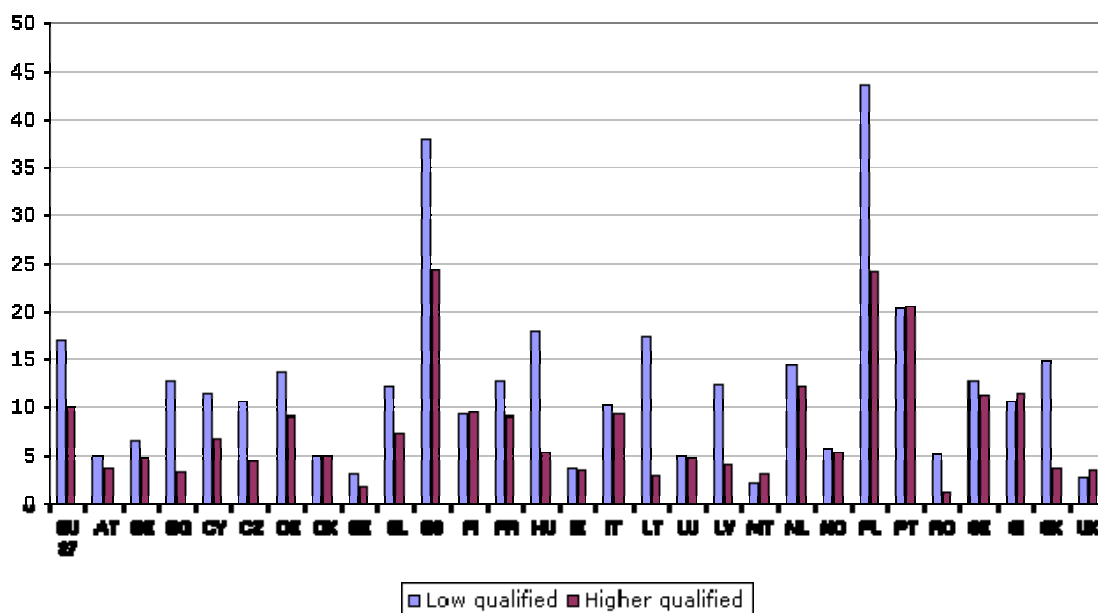
A more common pattern emerges across countries in respect of part-time work among women than in respect of those working long hours; relatively few men work part time and this is the case irrespective of their qualifications. In most countries, women with low qualifications were much more likely to be employed part time than those more qualified and this applies to both women working less than 15 hours a week and those working between 15 and 29 hours. In practice, therefore, low-qualified women not only tend to have lower wage rates than their more qualified counterparts but they also tend to work fewer hours. This partly reflects the fact that women with children need to arrange childcare when their children are not in school or pre-school if they work full time, which can often cost more than low-qualified women can earn by working. It is also the case, however, that many part-time jobs require relatively low skills and these may be the only jobs available to women with low qualifications.

In summary, therefore, women working part time tend disproportionately to be low qualified in countries where part-time work is reasonably well developed.

Fixed-term employment contracts

Men and women with low qualifications who are in work are much more likely to be employed in jobs with a fixed-term employment contract than those more qualified. This is the case for both broad age groups, but especially for those aged 25–49 years. In 2007, some 17% of male employees in this age group with low qualifications in the EU as a whole had fixed-term jobs compared with only 10% of those more qualified (Figure 16). Although the extent of the difference varies between countries, the general pattern is widespread across Europe. Only five countries – Finland, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and the UK – reported a smaller proportion of low-qualified employees on fixed-term contracts than those more qualified.

Figure 16: Men aged 25–49 years on fixed-term employment contracts, by qualification level, 2007 (%)



Men aged 25–49 years on fixed-term employment contracts, by qualification level, 2007 (%)

Source: European Labour Force Survey

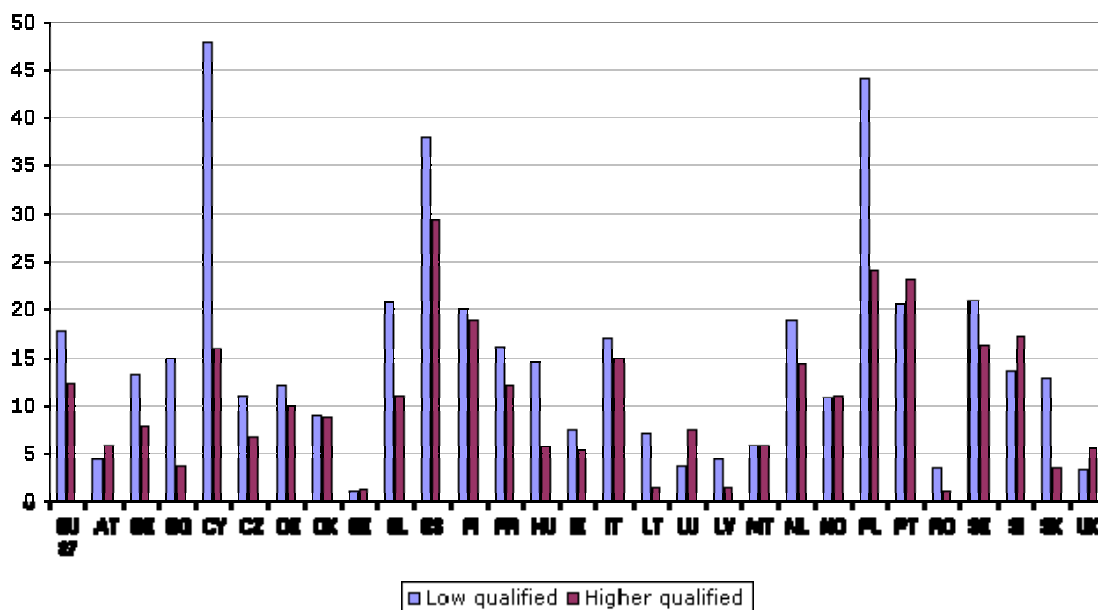
Those with low qualifications, therefore, tend to suffer a double disadvantage in the labour market: not only do they have less access to well-paid, high-quality jobs, but they are also in a more precarious, less certain employment situation. Indeed, in some countries, mostly the NMS – especially Hungary, Lithuania and Slovakia – few men with upper secondary or third-level education were in fixed-term jobs; thus, fixed-term employment contracts were very much associated with having a low educational level.

The picture is similar for men aged 50–64 years. While relatively few men are employed on fixed-term contracts, the proportion was almost twice as large among low-qualified workers as among those higher qualified in 2007. Just four countries reported a larger proportion for more qualified men in the older age group (Luxembourg, Malta, Slovakia and the UK), while only

Finland, Malta, Portugal and the UK did so for the younger age group. In all of these countries, the overall proportion of employees on fixed-term contracts was relatively small (under 4%).

In general, women in work are more likely than men to be employed on fixed-term contracts. As in the case of men, however, low-qualified women are much more likely to hold such employment contracts than those more qualified. Almost 18% of low-qualified female employees in the EU aged 25–49 years were employed in fixed-term jobs in 2007, compared with 12.5% of those more qualified (Figure 17). In this case, there were eight countries in which the difference was in the opposite direction – Austria, Estonia, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia and the UK; in all of these countries, the overall proportion of female employees with fixed-term employment contracts was relatively small.

Figure 17: Women aged 25–49 years on fixed-term employment contracts, by qualification level, 2007 (%)



Women aged 25–49 years on fixed-term employment contracts, by qualification level, 2007 (%)

Source: European Labour Force Survey

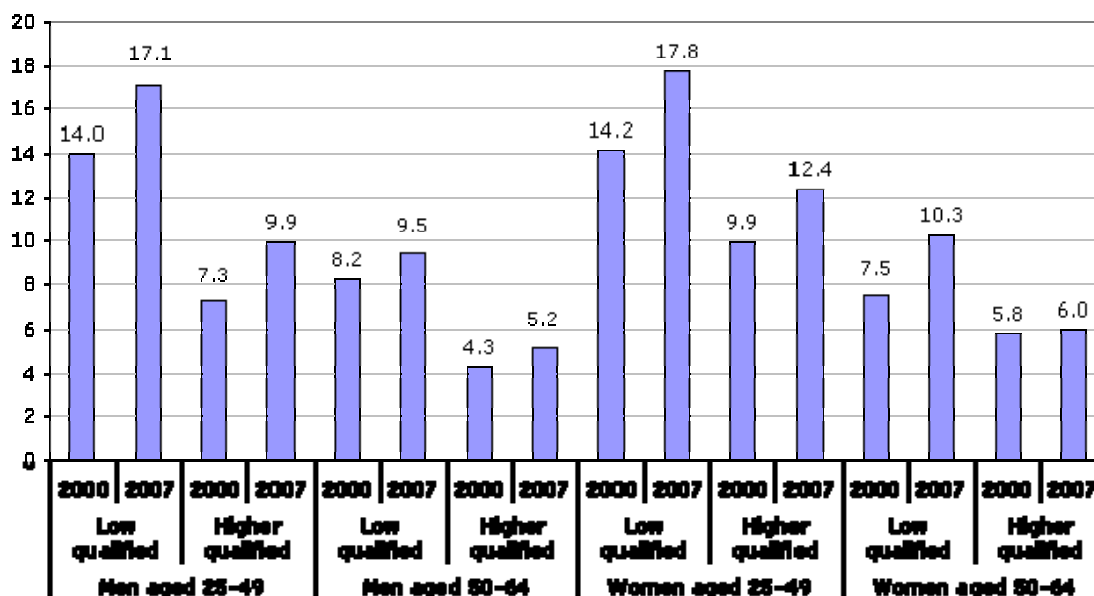
As is the case for men, the proportion of female employees in this younger age group with low qualifications in temporary jobs was particularly large in Poland (44%) and Spain (38%). However, unlike for men, the rate for women was even higher in Cyprus (48%), where it reached over four times the proportion for men and was three times greater than for women with higher qualifications.

Overall, fewer than 10% of female employees were in fixed-term employment contracts in 2007 in the EU; nevertheless, the proportion of low-qualified workers in such jobs was still significantly larger than for those more qualified. Only three countries – Estonia, Luxembourg and the UK (the last two being among the few where this was also the case for men) – reported fewer low-qualified women on fixed-term employment contracts than those more qualified.

The proportion of male and female employees on fixed-term employment contracts in the EU has increased over recent years, more for women than for men and slightly more for low-qualified

workers than for those higher qualified among both genders. However, the increase is much more apparent for low-qualified women aged 50–64 years than for their more qualified counterparts (Figure 18). The increase in fixed-term employment contracts among low-qualified workers, moreover, was widespread across countries, especially in the 25–49 age group and particularly in Poland, where the proportion of men and women employed in fixed-term jobs increased from 10%–15% in 2000 to 44% in 2007.

Figure 18: Men and women in fixed-term employment, by qualification level, EU, 2000 and 2007 (%)



Men and women in fixed-term employment, by qualification level, EU, 2000 and 2007 (%)

Source: European Labour Force Survey

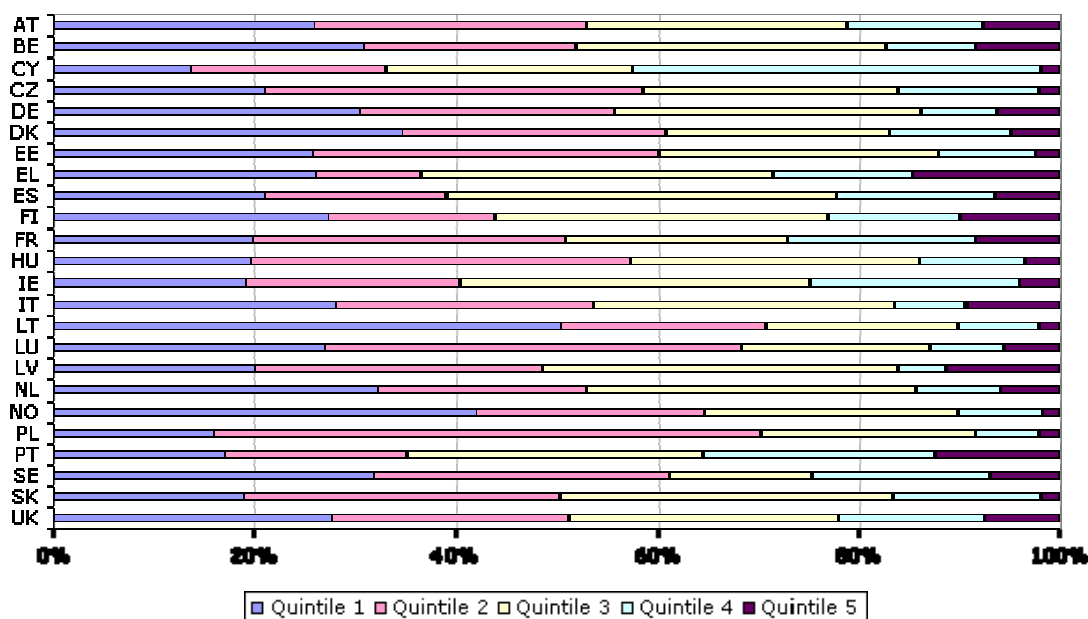
Wage levels

As would be expected, men and women with low qualifications are more likely to be employed in jobs with low earnings and less likely to be employed in positions with high earnings than their more qualified counterparts. The extent to which this is the case, however, varies markedly across countries.

This can be seen from the distribution of low-qualified men and women in work, ranked according to the hourly earnings which they are paid and then divided by quintile – or, in other words, into five segments containing an equal number of people in employment. Thus, the top segment, or the fifth quintile, contains the 20% of people who are in jobs with the highest earnings, while the fourth quintile contains the 20% of those in jobs with the next highest earnings, and so on down to the bottom decile containing the 20% of workers in jobs with the lowest earnings. If low-qualified workers were evenly distributed across jobs ranked in this way, then there would be 20% in each quintile; the extent to which the proportions in the different quintiles differ from 20% indicates the extent to which low-qualified workers are concentrated in more or less well-paid jobs.

The distribution of men across jobs in 2005 ranked in this way shows, firstly, that in 16 of the 24 countries for which data are available, low-qualified men were disproportionately employed in the lowest paid jobs, in that more than 20% of them were employed in jobs in the bottom quintile of the wage distribution (Figure 19). In all but four countries – Cyprus, Greece, Portugal and Spain, all in the south of Europe – more than 40% of low-qualified men were employed in jobs corresponding to the bottom two wage quintiles and, in all but Cyprus, more than 60% of them were employed in jobs in the bottom three wage deciles. By contrast, in all 24 countries – including Cyprus – much fewer than 20% of men with these qualifications were employed in the highest paid jobs in the top quintile.

Figure 19: Low-qualified men, by wage quintile, 2005 (%)



Low-qualified men, by wage quintile, 2005 (%)

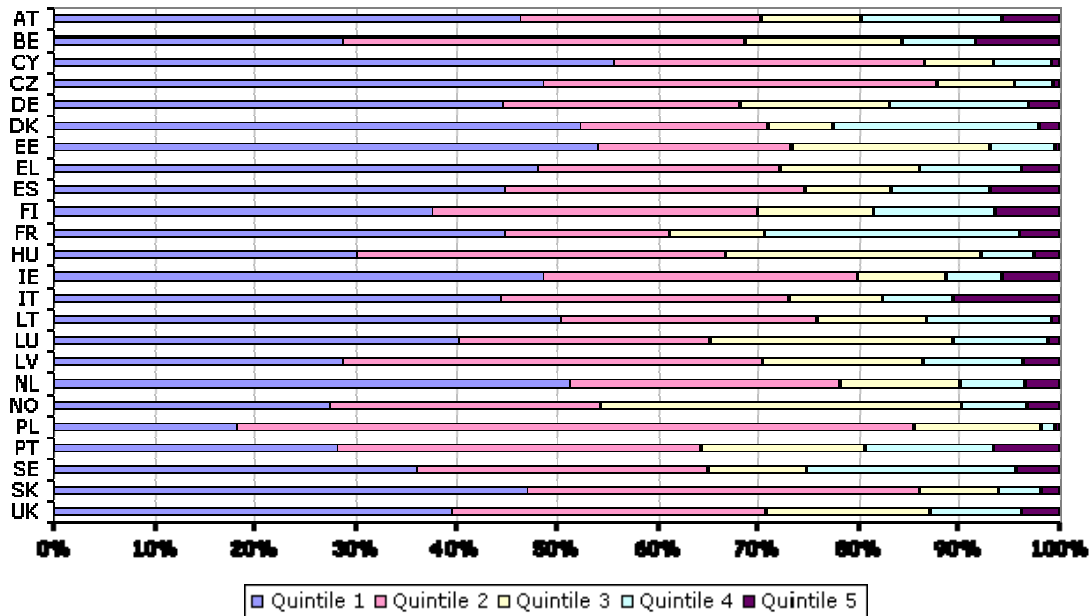
No data for Bulgaria, Malta, Romania and Slovenia.

Source: European Labour Force Survey

In Cyprus, therefore, and to a lesser extent in Greece, Portugal and Spain, there is a much more limited tendency for educational levels and wage rates for men to be positively related to each other than in the rest of the EU. On the other hand, a more pronounced concentration than elsewhere of low-qualified men in low-paid jobs (over 60% in the bottom two quintiles) is found in Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland and Sweden.

For women, the concentration of low-qualified workers in low-paid jobs was more marked than for men in nearly all countries. In five Member States – including Cyprus, in sharp contrast to the situation for men – over 50% of low-qualified women in employment worked in jobs in the bottom quintile of the wage distribution. In all but three countries – France, Portugal and Norway – 65% or more of these women had jobs corresponding to the bottom two wage quintiles (Figure 20). Moreover, only seven countries reported more than 5% of women with low qualifications having jobs in the top wage quintile, and in only one – Italy – was the proportion over 10%. Denmark, France and Sweden were the only Member States reporting more than 20% of low-qualified women in jobs in the top two wage quintiles.

Figure 20: Low-qualified women, by wage quintile, 2005 (%)



Low-qualified women, by wage quintile, 2005 (%)

Source: European Labour Force Survey

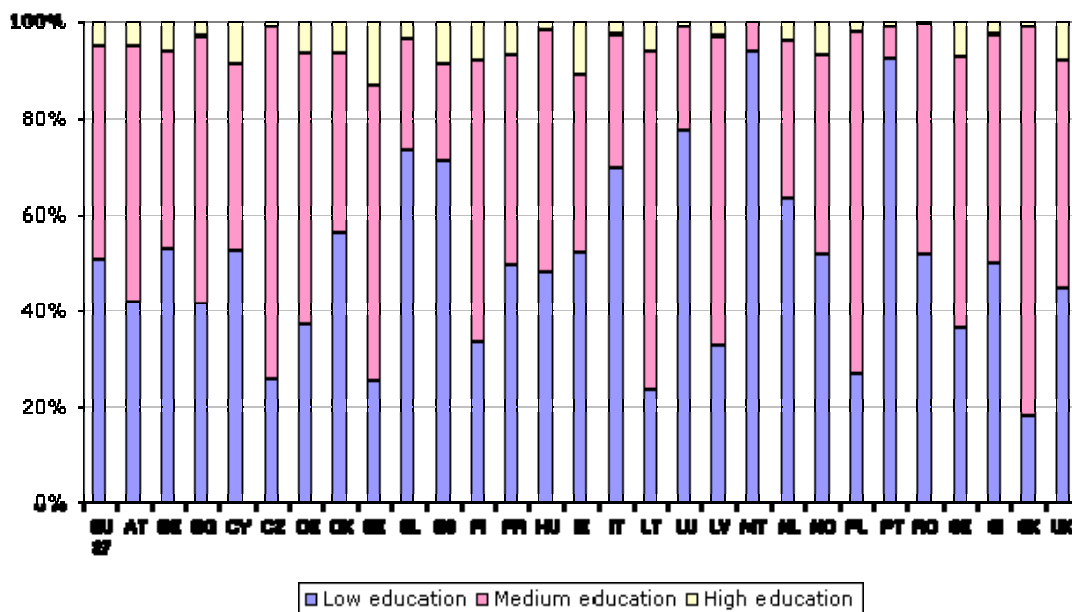
This finding partly reflects the fact that women overall are more likely than men to be in low-paid jobs. It also highlights the extent of the difference between low-qualified men and women in terms of the jobs that they do and the earnings that these carry, even if it cannot necessarily be assumed that there is a similar difference in actual earnings between the two genders.

Employment in low-skilled jobs

A further point of interest is to adopt the reverse perspective and examine employment in low-skilled jobs, rather than the jobs which low-qualified workers do, and the extent to which these positions are filled by low-qualified workers. The jobs in question are defined here as those falling into the category of ‘elementary’ – that is, those included in ISCO 9, according to the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) – together with agricultural workers, who although classed as ‘skilled’ in many cases require only a minimum amount of formal training.

In the EU as a whole, workers with only basic schooling filled just over half of such jobs in 2007. Almost 45% – that is, nearly as many – were filled by workers with upper secondary education while those with third-level education filled just 5% of the low-skilled jobs (Figure 21).

Figure 21: Workers employed in low-skilled jobs, by educational level, 2007 (%)



Workers employed in low-skilled jobs, by educational level, 2007 (%)

Note: Low-skilled jobs consist of those for agricultural workers (ISCO 6) and elementary workers (ISCO 9).

Source: European Labour Force Survey

The division of such jobs between people with different educational levels varied markedly between countries, largely in line with the proportion of people with a low educational level. Where this proportion is small, a greater share of low-skilled jobs – to the extent that they still need to be carried out – will necessarily be filled by those with higher educational levels. At the same time, the number of such jobs will tend in some degree to reflect the composition of the workforce in terms of educational levels, in the sense that having a large number of highly educated people is likely to encourage the development of jobs requiring high educational levels, while, conversely, having a small number is likely to constrain their development.

In many of the NMS where the proportion of people with only basic schooling is relatively small, therefore, only about a quarter or less of low-skilled jobs were filled by those with low qualifications. By contrast, in countries reporting a relatively large number of low-qualified workers – most especially Malta and Portugal – more than 90% of such jobs were filled by those with low qualifications, while in Greece, Italy, Luxembourg and Spain, this proportion was over 70%.

The trend reduction in the relative number of people of working age with no education beyond basic schooling across Europe has been accompanied by a decline in the proportion of low-skilled jobs being performed by those with low qualifications and a parallel increase in the proportion being performed by those more qualified. In the EU, therefore, the proportion of such jobs filled by low-qualified workers declined by 10 percentage points between 2000 and 2007, with a counterpart increase in the proportion being filled by those with upper secondary (for the most part) and third-level education. This shift was common to most countries, the only exceptions being Denmark, Latvia and Norway. The reduction in the share was particularly large – over 15 percentage points – in Bulgaria, Ireland and the UK.

The implication is that, in most countries, the trend reduction in the proportion of people with low education has not been accompanied by a decline on a similar scale in the proportion of jobs requiring only low educational levels. The further implication is that a growing number of people appear to be doing jobs for which they appear over-qualified and which, accordingly, are unlikely to offer them the job satisfaction that they are entitled to expect.

Participation in training

The report has shown so far that low-qualified workers are less likely to be in employment. Low-qualified persons who are active in the labour market are unemployed to a greater extent than more qualified people. The first aspect of marginalisation of low-qualified people lies, therefore, in the relatively small statistical chances of getting a job.

The second aspect of marginalisation of low-qualified workers lies in the characteristics of the jobs that they do. As described above, these jobs are poorly paid, are concentrated in certain economic sectors with mostly manual occupations and are on a fixed-term contractual basis more often than the jobs that more qualified people have.

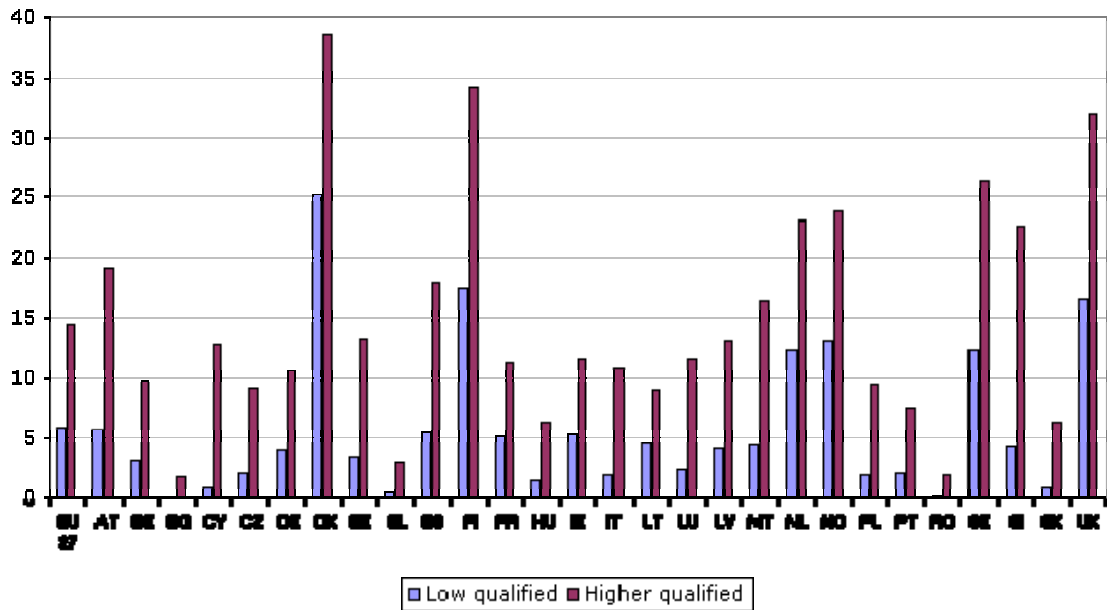
The third aspect is that low-qualified workers – who by definition are those with the most need of training – take part in training to a lesser degree than more qualified persons.

Participation in continuing training

Both men and women in employment with low qualifications are far less likely to receive continuing training than their more qualified counterparts. Although the LFS data on this subject relate to the receipt of education or training only within the four weeks preceding the survey and so might miss many workers who received training before then, the data give a reasonable indication of differences both across countries and between different groups of workers. In fact, a special LFS module in 2003 investigated participation in education and training over the year preceding the survey. As would be expected, this showed higher rates of participation than the data relating to the previous four weeks only; however, it found a similar pattern of relativities between countries and groups of workers. National data also show a similar difference between low and higher qualified workers in terms of their participation in continuing training.

In 2007, only about 4% of men aged 25–49 years with low education and 6% of women in this age group reported receiving education or training over the four weeks preceding the survey, in both cases much less than half of the proportion for those more qualified (Figures 22 and 23). For men and women aged 50–64 years, the proportions were just over 2% and 4%, respectively, in both cases amounting to only about a third of the percentages for those more qualified.

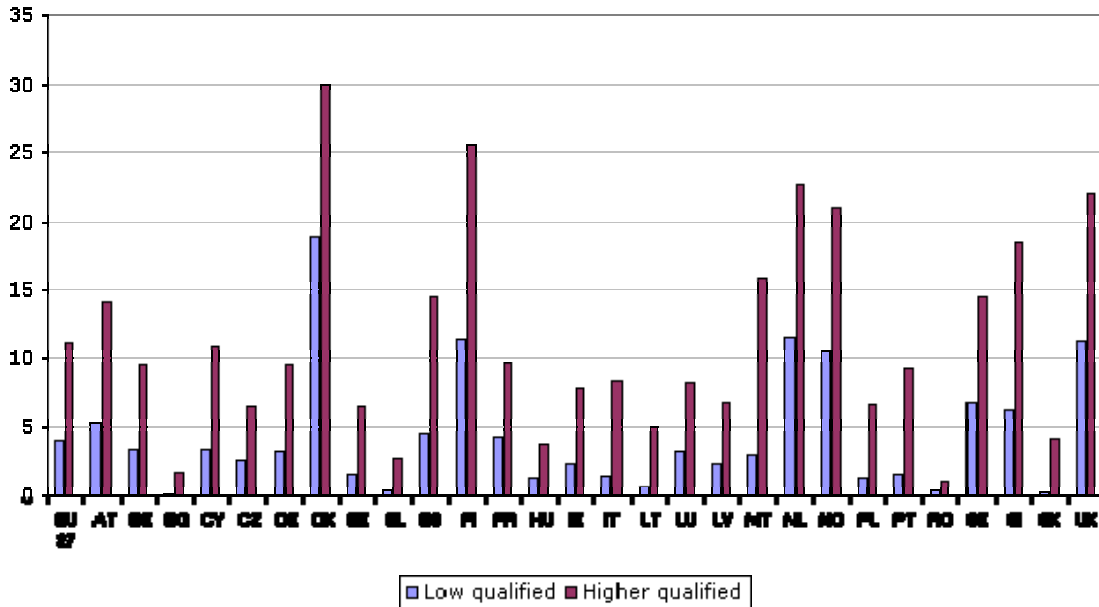
Figure 22: Women aged 25–49 years in receipt of training, by qualification level, 2007 (%)



Women aged 25–49 years in receipt of training, by qualification level, 2007 (%)

Source: European Labour Force Survey

Figure 23: Men aged 25–49 years in receipt of training, by qualification level, 2007 (%)



Men aged 25–49 years in receipt of training, by qualification level, 2007 (%)

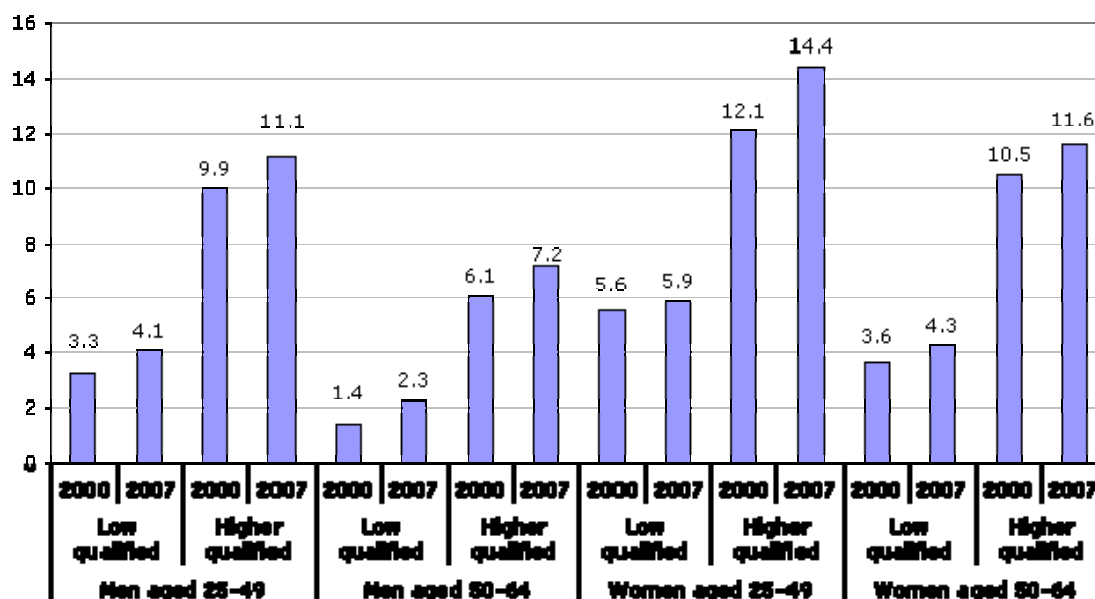
Source: European Labour Force Survey

The difference in the shares of the two groups receiving continuing education or training was especially great in proportionate terms in countries where relatively few workers overall were in receipt of training – in particular, in Greece, Italy, Portugal and many of the NMS. On the other hand, the difference was large in absolute terms where relatively high numbers of workers were in receipt of training – in the four Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, as well as in the Netherlands and the UK.

The evidence suggests, therefore, that men and women with low qualifications are doubly disadvantaged in the labour market in this respect also. Not only do they have more limited access to good jobs – and indeed to any job at all – than those more qualified, but they also have less chance of receiving the education or training that might enable them to improve their career prospects. The second part of the report will investigate to what extent this situation may be a result of their greater reluctance to engage in education or training rather than having more restricted opportunities open to them.

Whatever the main explanation, the evidence also indicates little overall improvement in the relative position of low-qualified workers with regard to participation in training over recent years. While a small increase was found in the proportion of men and women in the EU with only basic schooling who were participating in continuing education or training between 2000 and 2007, the increment was less than for those with upper secondary or third-level education (Figure 24). This was especially so in the case of those aged 25–49 years, and particularly for women.

Figure 24: Men and women receiving education or training, by qualification level, EU, 2000 and 2007 (%)



Men and women receiving education or training, by qualification level, EU, 2000 and 2007 (%)

Source: European Labour Force Survey

To conclude this part of the report, although substantial quantitative differences arise between Member States, European people with less than upper secondary school qualifications are disadvantaged in three different ways: the chances of getting a job, the characteristics of the jobs held, and the take-up and participation in training. All over Europe, the need for different kinds of support for low-qualified workers is therefore recognised. This study will now examine the different policy measures across Europe.

Part 2 – Policies to assist and support low-qualified workers

Following the line of argument from the first part of this report, there are at least three ways in which the governments and the social partners can try to assist and support low-qualified workers. Policy measures can strive to improve these workers' access to the labour market, enhance the **working conditions** of the jobs taken and/or increase the workers' training participation rate. This part of the study will therefore assess these policy groups; however, the second element – improving the working conditions of low-qualified workers – falls outside the scope of this comparative analysis and the questionnaires sent to national experts, and will not be dealt with other than indirectly here.

This part of the report also highlights two areas of interest for further discussion: the role of the social partners in assisting and supporting low-qualified people in general, and the low-qualified workers' take-up of training opportunities.

In some cases, it can be difficult in practice to make a clear distinction between, for instance, policies aiming to improve access to employment and training policies. Apprenticeships for example, arguably improve both access to employment and skills through hands-on training.

Improving access to employment

Job-search support and other active measures

The provision of education and training to raise the **employability** of low-qualified workers is, in many countries, coupled with other measures to help them to find a job once they have completed their training. These measures include counselling, guidance and job-search support as well as subsidies to employers to encourage them to take on low-qualified workers, in many cases in the form of partial exemption from employers' social contributions, especially in respect of those who have been out of work for a long time. Public works programmes are also used in some countries to provide a route for low-qualified people into employment, as are voucher schemes for domestic services. A few countries have undertaken studies on the effectiveness of the different measures.

In Sweden, the Public Employment Service ([Arbetsförmedlingen](#)) matches jobseekers to employers and provides support for those who have difficulties in finding a job, notably low-qualified persons. In addition to training programmes, activation measures include New Start Jobs for those unemployed for six months or more in the case of 20–25 year-olds and for one year in the case of those aged 25–55 years. These jobs last a year and employers effectively receive a subsidy equal to the payroll tax that they would otherwise pay in relation to the jobs. For people aged over 55 years, New Start Jobs can be up to twice as long as the person has been out of work.

A recent evaluation by the Swedish Public Employment Service of the various labour market measures implemented in the 1992–2006 period concluded that business grants and job creation subsidies had produced the best results (Nilsson, 2008). An evaluation of the New Start Jobs by the Institute for Labour Market Policy Evaluation ([Institutet för arbetsmarknadspolitisk utvärdering, IFAU](#)) found that they had been more effective than previous subsidy schemes in reaching low-qualified workers but that they also tended to displace regular jobs (Larsson, 2000). Moreover, in a third of cases, the person concerned would have been hired even without the subsidy.

In the Netherlands, a comprehensive approach is adopted to help unemployed people into work: local authorities provide advice and guidance, and the Employee Insurance Executive Agency ([Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemers Verzekering, UWV](#)) provides places for the workers on labour reintegration or social activation programmes before they have been out of work for a year. Those not able to find, or not qualified for, a job can enter a social activation programme, which includes voluntary service, training courses, work experience and similar measures.

In the UK, the various New Deal programmes (*New Deal for Young People*, *New Deal 25+* and *New Deal 50+*) aim to encourage people in various age groups being supported by social benefits into work, many of those concerned having low or no qualifications. Important elements include the provision of personal advisers, work experience and training opportunities. Participation in the schemes is compulsory rather than voluntary, in the sense that everyone who has been out of work for 12 months or more – or six months or more in the case of those aged less than 25 years – has to participate or lose the entitlement to benefit. According to a study published in 2002, however, 20%–25% of the young people who obtain jobs under the New Deal programme keep them for less than three months (White and Riley, 2002). Moreover, in the case of ethnic minorities, only 31% of placements result in long-term employment.

A range of active labour market measures in Ireland has contributed in recent years to reducing unemployment among low-qualified workers. The state Training and Employment Authority ([Foras Áiseanna Saothair, FÁS](#)) plays a central role in providing a placement service and advice and guidance to jobseekers, as well as designated apprenticeships and training programmes. Up

until 2006, these services applied to those aged 18–55 years who had been unemployed for six months and resulted in about 60% of people leaving the unemployment register. Since 2006, the period of unemployment for eligibility has been reduced to three months and the age range extended to those over 55 years.

In the Flemish region of Belgium, those with low skills are required to participate in an activation programme after being unemployed for three months, tailored to their specific needs and aiming to get them into work. The main developments in active labour market policies in the country as a whole have been the individualisation of support, strengthening the guidance and counselling provided, reducing the extent of under-representation in labour market programmes of the most vulnerable social groups through quotas and redesign of measures, and the creation of jobs in the social economy. A voucher system has been introduced throughout the country to subsidise the purchase of household services such as cleaning and ironing in order to create jobs for low-qualified people as well as to reduce the scale of **undeclared work** (see [case study](#)).

In Norway, a number of recent reforms have been directed, implicitly at least, at low-qualified workers. The Qualification Programme launched in 2007 by the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion ([Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet](#)) is intended to help those unable to find a job through a range of labour market measures, including counselling, career guidance, motivation and, if necessary, medical treatment and physical training, as well as education and work-related training ([press release \(in Norwegian\)](#), 2 November 2007).

The German federal government introduced an employment subsidy in 2007 for companies taking on young people with low educational levels or long-term unemployed people, with the aim of helping some 150,000 people into employment ([press release \(in German\)](#), 21 September 2007).

In Italy, a relatively large number of people of working age have low qualifications and, partly as a consequence of this, there is continuing demand from employers for workers with skills acquired through work experience rather than formal education. Thus, labour market policies are not targeted at low qualifications as such but at other social or personal characteristics giving rise to disadvantages in the labour market. In practice, however, these often go together with low qualifications. The Action Programme for Re-employment (*Programma d'Azione per il Reimpiego*, [PARI](#)) is, therefore, directed at those with disadvantages in general and includes a wide range of measures, such as recruitment bonuses for employers, incentives for company creation and support for job search.

In the NMS, the **European Social Fund (ESF)** is a major source of finance for other active labour market measures as well as training – career guidance and job search support in particular. This is the case in Slovenia, under the programme for 2007–2013, which is not specifically directed at low-qualified workers but these tend to be the largest group assisted. It is also the case in the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania and Malta.

The situation is similar in Poland, where successive national action plans for employment have included a general statement on the need to support low-qualified workers in the labour market. Moreover, the National Development Plan 2007–2013, setting out the allocation of European Structural Fund support, singles out these workers as a group deserving special attention.

In Hungary, under the START Extra Programme, funded mainly by the ESF, employers taking on workers aged 50 years and over with only basic schooling are exempt from the first year of social contributions and pay a fixed rate of 15% of the gross wage in the second year, as well as being exempt from paying the monthly health insurance contribution in both years. A 2007 study, however, concluded that labour market training programmes were not particularly effective in the case of low-educated people (Frey, 2008). The study suggested that public works were effective

in providing jobs for those who otherwise have little chance of finding employment in the open labour market, including low-qualified persons, in particular. However, it also concluded that the substantial expenditure involved ‘hardly has any lasting impact in helping participants to find regular, non-subsidised jobs’. In addition, another study argues that public works actually tend to strengthen patterns of unstable employment, especially among the Roma population (Kertesi, 2005).

In the Czech Republic, low-qualified workers accounted for about a third of all jobseekers in 2007, much more than their proportion of the working age population (Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs ([Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí, MPSV](#)), 2008). They have been assisted in the recent past by a programme, co-financed by the ESF, entitled ‘Strengthening active employment policy in the employment of jobseekers’; it was designed to remove labour market barriers and help people to find a job or improve their employability. Research, however, shows that unemployed people with low qualifications have the least chance of participating in training programmes, which are targeted mainly at those more educated (Sirovátka et al, 2006; Sirovátka and Kulhavý, 2007). Reasons for this finding may include the tendency of labour office staff to focus on ‘less problematic’ jobseekers, the lack of a suitable programme for the people concerned and the reluctance of low-qualified people to take part in training (see below). At the same time, the proportion of those who completed training programmes and subsequently found a job was largest among the low-qualified persons, which suggests perhaps that those who do participate in training are relatively strongly motivated.

In Bulgaria, successive national action plans for employment since 2001 have targeted low-qualified workers as a particular group to help. In addition to training programmes, measures have included subsidised employment and social work programmes, some of them operating at regional and municipal level. However, the jobs in question tend to be insecure, temporary and low paid. This led to a shift in focus in the 2008 national action plan from subsidised employment to vocational education and training and improving qualifications, as a response to the changing labour market situation, with declining unemployment and an increasing proportion of low-qualified persons among those unemployed.

Training measures

Policies for addressing the problem of low qualifications can be divided into a number of broad categories. The most common, and arguably the most important, are preventive measures aiming to tackle the problem at source by providing the education and training that young people need in order to raise their qualification levels. These measures cover, firstly, policies directed at trying to ensure that young people do not drop out of the education system before acquiring adequate qualifications to enable them to find a job of reasonable quality and pursue a satisfying working career as well as playing a full role in society; such policies accordingly serve to reduce the future scale of the problem. Secondly, the provisions cover policies designed to support those who leave school with inadequate qualifications and find themselves unable to get a job. These strategies in many cases take the form of providing access to apprenticeships or the chance to return to education or an initial vocational training programme that widens the career opportunities open to them.

Although much of the focus of policy across Europe towards low-qualified workers is, accordingly, on young people, measures also exist in all European countries to assist those who have left the education and training system some years before to increase or widen their skills and competences in order to raise their chances of finding a job or of remaining in employment. These measures are most frequently targeted at those who are unemployed, especially those who

have been out of work for a long period; however, increasingly, there is concern to help those in work to enhance their employability and the job opportunities open to them.

In parallel with the implementation of policies to enhance the skills and competences of low-qualified people, there is a growing recognition across Europe of the importance of broadening the definition of qualifications to include those that are acquired informally through learning by doing or through experience on the job. Efforts are, therefore, being made to establish or extend systems of accreditation of skills so that they encompass those acquired through informal as well as formal means and are given suitable weight. At the same time, policymakers are increasingly acknowledging the need to ensure that the education and training programmes undertaken by low-qualified people when out of work are either part of the mainstream system or lead to equivalent qualifications rather than to ones which carry little weight with prospective employers.

While most of the policies concerned are designed and implemented by governments, in a number of countries, social partners are involved in the process either by giving advice and guidance on programmes or, less frequently, in providing training and/or accreditation themselves. They are equally involved, especially on the trade union side, in trying to ensure a measure of protection for low-qualified workers in the labour market and to improve the terms and conditions of employment.

This report will now examine these various types of measures and the form that they take in different countries, with the aim of identifying the nature and scale of assistance and support provided to low-qualified workers across the countries concerned. The aim is also, however, to consider the difficulties that exist in helping low-qualified workers to improve their skill levels or acquire new qualifications, arising from their reluctance to participate in training programmes and, accordingly, to take the action required to help themselves.

Programmes for unemployed people

In the case of low-qualified workers who have been in the workforce for some time, measures to help them to increase their employability tend to begin when people become unemployed. Such measures are either targeted specifically at those with low qualifications or at those disadvantaged in the labour market more generally, such as people with social problems or disabilities, migrants or those from ethnic minority groups. In practice, it is often difficult to distinguish between the two categories since a low qualification level is in many cases a common characteristic of the people concerned, which is combined with another cause of disadvantage.

In Denmark, for example, the focus – through ‘job packages’ – is on assisting all unemployed people, regardless of their characteristics and circumstances, who have most difficulty in finding employment. The 12 different job packages are, therefore, designed to train people to do a specific job, such as driving a bus or cleaning. They involve formal training courses alongside work experience of up to 10 weeks, followed by partially subsidised employment and, finally, ‘full’ employment. Although low-qualified workers are a particular target group, they might account in some years for a minority of participants. In 2001, for example, only 37% of those taking up such training were defined as being lower qualified (Danish Ministry of Education ([Undervisningsministeriet](#)), 2001).

Austria – like many countries – experienced a shortage of skilled workers in recent years. It provides programmes such as Intensive Training for Skilled Workers (*Facharbeiterintensivausbildung*) to enable low-qualified people to complete an apprenticeship or attend supplementary courses to widen the choice of jobs open to them. A specific programme, Women in Trades and Technology (*Frauen in Handwerk und Technik*, FIT), is directed at low-qualified women who are out of work, enabling them to complete an apprenticeship or obtain a school-leaving certificate in technical subjects.

Similarly, in Ireland, FÁS provides specific training for low-qualified workers, the main measure being the One Step Up scheme, launched in 2005, which enables them to acquire skills and competences accredited within the National Framework of Qualifications so that they can both find a job and move between jobs more easily.

In Portugal, a New Opportunities Initiative was launched in 2005, aiming to ensure that everyone can progress to at least upper secondary level education. However, as noted earlier, this Member State has a considerable way to go to increase the number of people with at least upper secondary qualifications to the rate in other countries.

Many of the measures in force aim to prevent those out of work from becoming long-term unemployed, which is a particular risk for low-qualified persons, as indicated above. This is the case in the Netherlands, where – as noted above – a comprehensive approach is being implemented by local authorities and UWV to offer all unemployed people a place on a labour market reintegration or social activation programme before they have been out of work for a year.

In France, Employment Accompaniment Contracts (*Contrats d'Accompagnement dans l'Emploi*, CAE) are targeted at people having difficulty in finding a job, regardless of their age, qualifications or other characteristics; again, low-qualified workers form a large part of those concerned.

Likewise, in Spain, labour market measures in the form of training are also directed primarily at those who have been out of work for a long time, low-qualified workers featuring prominently in the target group. The main body responsible – the Tripartite Foundation for Training in Employment ([Fundación Tripartita para la Formación en el Empleo](#)) – aims to provide training in line not only with the requirements of the people concerned but also with the needs of the labour market. This strategy is adopted to try to ensure that jobs are available for the people trained to do them and that, as in Austria, skill shortages are reduced.

In Spain, these measures are partly financed by the European Structural Funds, particularly by the ESF, which is also the case in many other countries, especially in the NMS, where EU funding is particularly important.

In Hungary, the Step One, Step Ahead programme is part of the Human Resources Development Operational Programme, co-financed by the ESF, and is similarly designed to provide training for low-qualified people in vocations for which local labour is considered to be in short supply. Once participants have successfully completed their training programmes and start working, they are paid the monthly minimum wage. Typical occupations covered by the programmes include shop assistants, machine operators, caretakers, nurses and cleaners, and the evidence is that some 60% of participants succeed in finding a job after completing training ([European Network of Reference and Expertise \(ReferNet\)](#), 2008).

In these countries, much of the focus is equally on teaching basic skills to those with little or no education beyond basic schooling to enable them to obtain formal qualifications. This is the case in Latvia and Slovenia, where such measures have been introduced as part of the 2007–2013 programme supported by the ESF, while in Lithuania – where people without a minimum level of schooling are excluded from vocational training programmes – measures are in the process of being developed to enable these persons to acquire the educational qualifications required.

Similar provisions were included in the Greek Education and Initial Vocational Training Operational Programme under the Third Community Support Framework for the period 2000–2006, co-financed by the ESF. For example, it allowed for the establishment of ‘second chance schools’ and adult education centres, designed to help people to obtain the qualifications needed to enrol in the general education and vocational training system.

In some countries, measures are directed at specific groups of low-qualified workers who are particularly disadvantaged in the labour market. In Romania, for example, an important initiative – ‘Inclusion of seniors in the labour market’ – targets older people and is designed to increase employment among those aged 45 years or more who have ‘poor or incomplete qualifications’.

In Slovakia, a particular focus is on the situation of the Roma, the great majority of whom have at most only basic schooling, and in many cases a much lower level of education than this, and on increasing the very small numbers in formal employment. In Hungary, where a similar problem exists, a number of initiatives and training programmes have been implemented to assist Roma and other disadvantaged groups of this kind. A major challenge, however, is to persuade the target group concerned to take part in such programmes, which is an issue discussed in some detail below.

Sweden provides an example of a policy for low-qualified workers aimed not only at unemployed people but more generally to include those in work as well. Between 1997 and 2002, an ambitious programme was in operation, known as the Adult Education Initiative or ‘Knowledge Lift’, which had the objective of raising the educational levels of low-qualified workers with only basic schooling to at least upper secondary level through a three-year course of full-time education. The scale of the programme was unprecedented, with more than 10% of the labour force participating over this period, each of them receiving financial support equivalent to the unemployment benefit.

Continuing training

In most countries, the policy focus as regards low-qualified workers is on those who are unemployed. Nonetheless, in a number of cases, efforts are being made – as in Sweden over the period noted above – to give low-qualified workers in employment and people who out of the labour force entirely, that is, those who are economically inactive, a chance to raise their skill levels. As noted earlier, the participation of low-qualified workers in continuing training is considerably lower throughout Europe than of those with higher educational levels. Irrespective of whether this is because of employers providing less access to training programmes or because low-qualified workers might be more reluctant to participate – an issue examined further below – policy action, whether by governments or the social partners or both, seems necessary to increase these workers’ involvement in order to widen the choice of jobs open to them.

In Austria, therefore, one of the main aims of the Operational Programme for Employment for 2007–2013 is to boost the participation of low-qualified workers in further training and to give them a chance of obtaining a general secondary school leaving certificate (*Hauptschulabschluss*) as well as of acquiring basic skills. Furthermore, in the capital city, the Vienna Employment Promotion Fund (*Wiener ArbeitnehmerInnen Förderungsfonds*, WAFF), which has its origins in a programme initiated by the Austrian Chamber of Labour ([Arbeiterkammer, AK](#)) and the Austrian Trade Union Confederation ([Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund, ÖGB](#)), aims to reduce barriers to further education and raise awareness among low-qualified workers of the advantages to their careers prospects of a better education and further training.

The German Federal Employment Agency ([Bundesagentur für Arbeit](#)) has bundled together a number of existing schemes into a new programme – ‘Further education for low-skilled people and older employees in enterprises’ (*Abkürzung für Weiterbildung Geringqualifizierter und beschäftigter älterer Arbeitnehmer in Unternehmen*, WeGebAU). It provides training for both low-qualified persons generally and older workers aged 45 years or more with outdated skills employed in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), with the aim of giving them the opportunity to obtain new vocational qualifications. The companies involved receive a wage subsidy from the employment agency to cover training costs.

In Finland, the Ministry of Education ([Opetusministeriö](#)), in cooperation with the Ministry of Employment and the Economy ([Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö](#)) and the social partners, launched the *Noste* programme in 2003 to raise the education and skill levels of those aged 30–59 years with no qualification beyond compulsory schooling, the aim being to improve the career prospects of the people concerned and extend their working life. By the end of 2007, some 21,500 people had enrolled in the programme – fewer than expected – and over 12,700 had completed it successfully.

In Norway – although as in many other countries, policies tend not to target specific groups – a range of schemes are in place across the country, run by municipalities, to provide education and training to those who want to increase their qualifications ([VOX](#), Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning, 2008).

The Luxembourg Ministry for National Education and Vocational Training ([Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Formation professionnelle](#)) launched a programme of evening courses in 2006 under the title of ‘Second route to qualifications’ as part of adult education policy; the intention was to enable people, whatever their starting level, to become more qualified. In 2008, while a large number of participants dropped out before finishing the programme, all of those who completed it did so successfully.

In the NMS, policies for encouraging continuing training are relatively limited, although there is growing recognition of the need for workers to be able to increase and extend their skills and competences. This trend is reflected in the channelling of European Structural Funds, particularly the ESF, to support measures aiming to achieve this objective, encouraged by EU policy guidelines.

In the Czech Republic, for example, ESF co-financed training programmes are designed for the ‘integration of specific population groups at risk of social exclusion’ and are not confined to low-qualified workers as such. The programmes, however, tend to be relatively general in nature, usually involve informal, ‘on-the-job’ methods, and there is limited attempt to tailor them to individual needs.

In Poland, as in the Czech Republic, no specific policies exist to tackle the problem of low qualifications. Nevertheless, the 2008 national action plan for employment emphasises the importance of assisting disadvantaged groups through sector-specific programmes which train low-qualified workers for jobs that are in demand in the labour market; it also underlines the need to encourage continuing training. The vocational training of low-qualified workers is one of the focal points of the Operational Programme on Human Capital for the 2007–2013 programming period, co-financed by the ESF.

Validation of competences

It is increasingly widely recognised that an important aspect of policies to assist low-qualified workers concerns the certification of skills and competences obtained through informal means ‘on the job’. While those involved may lack formal qualifications, they are often skilled in performing particular tasks, especially jobs requiring manual dexterity and/or long experience of working in a given activity. Efforts have been made in a number of countries over recent years, therefore, as well as at EU level to establish a commonly accepted system of validating skills informally acquired and of certifying these in order to extend the job opportunities open to the workers concerned.

For example, the Competence Agenda 2010 approved by the Flemish region in Belgium in 2007 and co-financed by the ESF, aims to create a broad social basis for [lifelong learning](#) by widening

the concept to include informal as well as formal methods of learning and by focusing explicitly on the competences required for employability.

In France, an alternative pathway to formal vocational qualifications had been developed earlier in the form of the Accreditation of Work Experience (*Validation des acquis de l'expérience*, VAE), which, in 2004, was taken up by some 17,000 people. However, low-qualified workers represented only a small minority of these.

In Greece, a joint working group of trade union, employer and government representatives has formulated proposals for a system to certify the successful completion of training programmes.

Efforts have also been made recently in Malta to recognise informal learning by establishing a means of 'trade testing', carried out by the country's public employment service – the [Employment and Training Corporation \(ETC\)](#) – to measure the technical competence of workers in a specific occupational activity.

In Romania, the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth ([Ministerul Educației, Cercetării și Inovării, MECI](#)) and the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection ([Ministerul Muncii, Familiei și Protecției Sociale, MMFPS](#)) have issued a joint order for the approval of an assessment and certification procedure for the skills acquired through informal learning. Employers and trade unions have also been involved in setting up such a procedure. A tripartite agreement signed in 2005 was intended to establish a National Qualification Framework, under which the social partners pledged to cooperate in helping to create a coherent national system of professional qualifications, applicable both to initial and to continuing education and training. The agreement led to the establishment of tripartite sectoral boards in 21 of the 23 sectors of the national economy.

In Slovenia, the private sector rather than government has taken the initiative in setting up a validation system, with the manufacturing company [Iskra Avtoelektrika](#) – in cooperation with education institutions – developing two national vocational qualifications for the recognition of informally acquired knowledge.

Measures to assist young people

As indicated above, a large part of the efforts of governments to assist low-qualified people is directed at reducing the numbers of this group entering the labour market and at helping those who do to acquire the skills and competences that they need to find a suitable job in both the short and longer term. This is particularly important in countries like Greece or some of the NMS, such as Bulgaria, Poland and Romania, where a large but diminishing number of jobs do not require qualifications beyond basic schooling. In these countries, accordingly, low-qualified workers can still find work, albeit with increasing difficulty. Such difficulty primarily arises because of the decline in the agricultural sector and because of competition from more qualified workers in jobs outside of agriculture, as is evident from the increase in the proportion of low-skilled jobs being filled by those with higher educational levels.

In Greece, the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs ([Υπουργείο Εθνικής Παιδείας και Θρησκευμάτων, ΥΠΕΠΘ](#)) has developed an operational programme Education and Lifelong Learning for the 2007–2013 period, under the European Structural Funds. It has set the goals of reducing the early school drop-out rate from 13.3% to 10% and of increasing the rate of completion of secondary education from 84% to 86%.

In Cyprus, programmes co-financed by the ESF and the Human Resource Development Authority ([Αρχή Ανάπτυξης Ανθρώπινου Δυναμικού Κύπρου, AvAD](#)) give young people leaving school the opportunity to participate in both vocational training and work experience programmes.

In Poland, young people who fail to complete primary or secondary school, or who decide not to continue their education after compulsory schooling, have an opportunity to gain additional qualifications and skills in the Voluntary Work Corps ([Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy](#), [OHP](#)).

The Estonian government's Lifelong Learning Strategy 2005–2008 aimed to give young people aged 17 years and over who had left school an opportunity to obtain higher qualifications through education in adult schools or in evening or extension courses in secondary schools (Estonian Ministry of Education and Research ([Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium](#)), 2005).

In several of the EU15, policies for assisting young people to become more qualified focus on providing access to the apprenticeship system or to traineeships. This is the case in Germany, where the Immediate Programme for the Reduction of Youth Unemployment (*Jugendsofortprogramm*, JUMP) was launched in 1998 to help prepare young people without qualifications for vocational training programmes ([DE0209203F](#)). In 2004, this was supplemented by an Apprenticeship Pact between employers and the federal government aiming to create new apprenticeships (German Chambers of Industry and Commerce ([Deutscher Industrie- und handelskammertag](#), [DiHK](#)), [press release \(in German\)](#), 5 March 2007). In the same year, employers agreed to provide 25,000 work experience opportunities annually up until 2006 for young people with inadequate qualifications entering apprenticeships; in 2007, the number of places was increased to 40,000 a year, according to an [article \(in German\)](#) by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs ([Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales](#), [BMAS](#)). In the autumn of 2007, a subsidy was also introduced to encourage companies to employ low-skilled young people as well as long-term unemployed persons.

Another example is in Austria, where the Ensuring Youth Training and Education Act (*Jugendausbildungssicherungsgesetz*, JASG) provides additional apprenticeships for young people who leave school and are unable to find a job (Austrian Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth ([Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Familie und Jugend](#), [BMWFJ](#)) – formerly the Federal Ministry of Economy and Employment ([Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Arbeit](#), [BMWA](#)), 2006). In addition, the Jobs4You programme, targeted at those aged less than 25 years who are unemployed and have minimal qualifications, is intended to provide training leading to a certified qualification, including the completion of an apprenticeship (*ibid*). Catch-up courses for those who do not have secondary education are provided by the Austrian Public Employment Service ([Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich](#), [AMS](#)).

In Italy, the apprenticeship system, which was reformed in 2003, distinguishes between qualifying apprenticeships and apprenticeships relating to training rights and obligations, the second option being directed at those aged 16–18 years who failed to attain any qualifications at school. The apprenticeship alternates a maximum of 1,100 hours of in-service training with off-the-job training over a period of three years. The intention is that it should be governed by [collective agreements](#) at national, regional or company level, although this aspect has yet to be implemented.

In France, the Professionalisation Contract (*Contrat de professionnalisation*) is similar to an apprenticeship in combining working in a company with formal teaching, the target group consisting of both young people who have left school without sufficient qualifications and those with some vocational training but who have been unemployed for a long time. In addition, the Young People in the Enterprise Contract (*Contrat jeunes en entreprise*) subsidises employers who take on young people aged 16–22 years who fall into this category by reducing the social contributions that they have to pay. According to a survey conducted by the Research and Statistics Department ([Direction de l'Animation de la Recherche, des Études et des Statistiques](#), [DARES](#)) of the French Ministry of Labour, Social Relations, Family Affairs, Solidarity and Urban Affairs ([Ministère du Travail, des Relations Sociales, de la Famille, de la Solidarité et de la](#)

[Ville](#)), more than 80% of the young people who went through such programmes were in employment 30 months later.

Since the autumn of 2008, all young people aged 19–25 years in the UK who do not have at least an upper secondary level qualification have been entitled to free training to obtain such a qualification. From 2010, the scheme will form part of personal skills accounts, which will extend to people aged over 25 years and will provide training to enable them to acquire upper secondary level qualifications. In addition, it is planned to reduce the number of low-qualified workers in future years by raising the compulsory school leaving age to 18 years, with apprenticeships being a core part of the policy.

In Luxembourg, measures to help young people into employment were reformed in 2007, with the aim of giving more support to those with genuine prospects of finding a job. Training programmes were reduced to nine months and the pay given to those on active measures was reduced to 80% of the minimum wage. However, at the same time, all of the people involved were granted entitlement to a personal tutor.

Role of social partners

Although mainly governments implement policies to assist and support low-qualified workers, the social partners are involved in helping to design and carry out programmes in many countries, since they also have an interest in raising the level of the vocational qualifications of the workforce. Many employers provide training and work experience as part of such programmes and some trade unions operate schemes for upgrading the skills of their members. In addition, as noted above, the social partners are also involved in some countries in developing systems for recognising informal qualifications as well as improving the terms and conditions of employment of low-qualified workers.

In Belgium, a range of bipartite measures were established in the 1980s and early 1990s to increase access to training for groups at risk of being excluded from the labour market, which were then complemented by tripartite agreements at regional level.

In Denmark, a tripartite collective agreement on adult and further training concluded in 2007 enhanced continuing training opportunities for low-qualified workers and, in the same year, the government provided some €130 million of funding to assist their training, on condition that employers set aside a similar amount for this purpose. This was in the context of a growing shortage of skilled workers, which gave an incentive to provide training to low-qualified persons to do the jobs concerned (Damsgaard, 2008).

The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions ([Landsorganisasjonen i Norge, LO](#)) and the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise ([Næringslivets Hovedorganisasjon, NHO](#)) agreed a [plan of action](#) at the end of the 1990s for the development of competences, which included a provision entitling low-qualified people to complete upper secondary education after reaching 25 years. An evaluation of the programme in 2006 by the [Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research \(Fafo\)](#) concluded that, in practice, those with an educational level below upper secondary were underrepresented among the more than 80,000 workers who participated. Moreover, comparatively few of those participating were employed in low-skill sectors, such as wholesale and retail trade, hotels and restaurants, and transport.

In Estonia, trade unions and employer organisations participated in the development of national-level government policies, in particular, the Lifelong Learning Strategy and the Action Plan for Growth and Jobs 2005–2008 and 2009–2013. These programmes partly aimed to give an opportunity to low-qualified workers to increase their qualifications and return to education.

There are also examples of trade unions taking independent action to widen access to continuing training. For instance, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation ([Landsorganisationen i Sverige, LO](#)) initiated a project entitled ‘Competence development and learning at the workplace’ in 2001–2003, with the objective of increasing the opportunities open to trade union members to participate in lifelong learning, both inside and outside the workplace.

In Bulgaria, trade unions have called for improving equal access to workplace training and establishing special funds for continuing vocational training for low-qualified workers. In addition, the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria ([Конфедерация на независимите синдикати в България, CITUB](#)) organises courses for employed and unemployed low-qualified workers to upgrade their skills and acquire important competences. The Confederation of Labour Podkrepa ([Страница на КТ Подкрепа, CL Podkrepa](#)) also has its own training centre.

The UK government has encouraged employers to do more to raise the skill levels of their workforce, by making a Skills Pledge to provide support for their employees to become better qualified and to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills.

In Greece, the main initiative taken by the social partners to help low-qualified workers is the [National General Collective Agreement](#) (*Εθνική Γενική Συλλογική Σύμβαση Εργασίας, EGSSE*), which sets minimum terms and conditions of employment and, in particular, fixes the level of minimum basic wages for low-skilled workers.

It seems that the social partners around Europe are most engaged in increasing the skill levels and hence the employability of low-qualified workers. Social partners also have an obvious interest in improving working conditions for these workers. Employer organisations can be helpful in arranging apprenticeships and similar measures to improve access to the labour market, as well as increasing employability. It is certainly in the interest of all social partners to enhance the qualification level of the workforce as it is an essential requirement for the development of the labour market and the economy.

However, as discussed below, the challenges for low-qualified workers lie not only in the actual opportunities of the labour market and training, but also in relation to the workers’ take-up of these opportunities. Perhaps the most important role of the social partners in this regard is to boost the workers’ motivation and self-confidence in order to make their participation in, for example, training more likely.

Take-up of training opportunities

It has been shown (Lyly-Yrjanainen, 2008, pp. 22–23) that low-qualified workers are offered less training than other groups of workers. A crucial issue, however, as mentioned at a number of points above, relates not only to the access of the low-qualified workers to training and other labour market measures – and to the provision of these by governments and the social partners – but also to the willingness of the people concerned to pursue the opportunities on offer. A number of surveys have found that at least part – and, in some cases, a large part – of the reason for the considerable disparity in participation in training programmes between low-qualified workers and their more qualified peers is attributable to the greater reluctance of the former to enrol in such programmes. An important aspect of policy towards low-qualified workers is, therefore, to encourage them to take part in training and other measures designed to increase their skills and competences, and to make them aware of the potential advantages of doing so for their future career prospects.

A possible difficulty in this regard is that, in order to motivate low-qualified workers to participate in training programmes, there must be a clear benefit to them, especially in terms of

higher earnings, which may not always be the case or which may not be recognised as such; thus, awareness-raising campaigns are important. Furthermore, if the competences obtained from training are either not transferable to other jobs or are not recognised, this represents an additional disincentive to participate. This obstacle highlights the importance of establishing systems for the validation and certification of qualifications and of ensuring that, insofar as possible, formal education or training programmes undertaken are part of the mainstream education system.

A set of surveys carried out in Portugal concluded that, the lower the educational level and the older the age of the person, the less the predisposition to undertake training courses (Carneiro, 2007).

In Spain, several studies carried out by the Economic and Social Council ([Consejo Económico y Social, CES](#)) suggest that continuing training has limited effects on correcting disparities in qualification levels between workers, since those most in need of education and training tend also to be those least aware of the benefits. Moreover, this lack of awareness is reinforced by the tendency of employers to concentrate investment in training on more highly qualified workers because they expect to obtain the highest return from so doing.

The results of a study carried out in Upper Austria in the recent past indicate that lack of awareness of the potential benefits and the availability of financial assistance are not the only reasons for the reluctance of low-qualified workers to participate in training programmes (Mörth et al, 2005). Other important factors include the negative connotations associated with education because of their failure to succeed when at school, their doubts about their ability to complete the training successfully and the fact that many courses take place outside working hours.

However, the study also pointed to factors motivating low-qualified workers to participate in training, such as the desire for self-development and the acquisition of new skills, and the possibility of having contact with other people. In addition, it indicated that, once people had pursued a training programme, they were much more likely to repeat the experience in the future, not least because most of them believed that the training they had received had helped to improve their job prospects.

At the same time, studies carried out in other countries indicate the importance of designing training programmes with the needs of low-qualified workers in mind. In Belgium, an evaluation of programmes shows that the low participation rate of low-qualified workers not only reflects a lack of motivation but also the fact that training is seldom tailored to the needs of the people concerned, who in any case often work in companies providing little opportunity for training.

In Ireland, a recent research paper found that employees reporting extensive consultation about their jobs were also more likely to participate in training, as were those in workplaces that had adopted family-friendly working arrangements (O'Connell, [Economic and Social Research Institute \(ESRI\)](#), 2007). By the same token, companies providing a favourable working environment, which tended to be the larger enterprises, were more likely to provide training than others.

Conclusions

Although substantial quantitative differences arise between Member States, European people with less than upper secondary school qualifications are disadvantaged in three different ways: the chances of getting a job, the characteristics of the jobs held, and the take-up and participation in training. Policies primarily focus on ensuring that as few people as possible drop out of the school system with inadequate qualifications. However, it is equally important to ensure that those who have low qualifications can find a way into the labour market and obtain stable employment. Apprenticeships have proved to be a good way to achieve this objective.

With the continuously evolving European employment market and the fact that the required skills are constantly changing, there is also a clear need for lifelong learning. For obvious reasons, this need is more immediate for people who have fallen out of the labour market or are unemployed.

One obstacle that hampers the situation of low-qualified workers is the fact that employers provide less training to this group of workers compared with other workers, as well as the reluctance of the low-qualified people themselves to participate in training.

The social partners have an important role to play in various respects. Trade unions often develop and implement policies to improve the characteristics of the jobs held by low-qualified workers. Furthermore, the social partners have first-hand information of what kind of skills are valued in the labour market and thus should be offered to low-qualified workers through continuous vocational training or to unemployed people. The social partners also have a vital part to play in boosting motivation and confidence among low-qualified workers in order to increase their take-up of opportunities and training. Finally, the social partners should agree on ways to validate skills acquired through work rather than through formal education, which is increasingly highlighted as an important means of strengthening the position of people with less than secondary education.

Bibliography

Austrian Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth (*Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Familie und Jugend*) – formerly the Federal Ministry of Economy and Employment (*Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Arbeit*), *Jugend und Arbeit in Österreich* [Youth and Work in Austria], Vienna, 2006.

Carneiro, R. (ed.), Valente, A.C., Fazendeiro, A., de Carvalho, L.X. and Abecasis, M., *Baixas qualificações em Portugal* [Low skills in Portugal], Cogitum Collection No. 29, Lisbon, Study Centre for Peoples and Cultures of Portuguese Expression (*Centro de Estudos dos Povos e Culturas de Expressão Portuguesa*), Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity (*Ministério do Trabalho e da Solidariedade Social, MTSS*), 2007.

Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (*Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí*), *Analýza vývoje zaměstnanosti a nezaměstnanosti v roce 2007* [Analysis of the development of employment and unemployment in 2007], Prague, 2008, available online (in Czech) at: http://portal.mpsv.cz/sz/politikazamest/trh_prace/rok2007/Anal2007.pdf.

Damsgaard, Z., ‘Desperate virksomheder ansætter ufaglærte’, *Dagbladet Børsen*, Copenhagen, 10 May 2008, available online (in Danish) at: http://borsen.dk/okonomi/nyhed/131653/newsfeeds_rss/.

Danish Ministry of Education (*Undervisningsministeriet*), *Handlingsplan for ufaglærte*, Copenhagen, 2001.

- Estonian Ministry of Education and Research (*Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium*), *Lifelong Learning Strategy 2005–2008*, Tallinn, 2005, available online at: <http://www.hm.ee/index.php?popup=download&id=4958>.
- European Network of Reference and Expertise (ReferNet), *Vocational education and training in Hungary – Thematic Overview 2007*, Observatory for Educational Development, Corvinus University of Budapest, 2008.
- Frey, M., ‘Evaluation of active labour market programmes 2001–2006 and the main changes in 2007’, in Fazekas, K., Cseres-Gergely, Z. and Scharle Á. (eds), *The Hungarian labour market – Review and analysis 2008*, Budapest, Institute of Economics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Hungarian Employment Foundation, 2008, available online at: http://www.econ.core.hu/file/download/mt/2_eleje.pdf.
- German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (*Deutscher Industrie- und handelskammartag*), ‘Ausbildungspakt verlängert – erfolgreiche Arbeit wird fortgesetzt!’, press release, Berlin, 5 March 2007, available online (in German) at: <http://www.dihk.de/inhalt/informationen/news/meldungen/meldung009586.html>.
- German federal government (*Bundesregierung*), ‘Fuß fassen am Arbeitsmarkt’, press release, 21 September 2007, available online (in German) at: <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Artikel/2007/07/2007-07-06-lohnzuschuesse-fuer-jugendliche-und-langzeitarbeitslose.layoutVariant=Druckansicht.html>.
- German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (*Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales*, BMAS), ‘Einstiegsqualifizierung’, Berlin, 8 September 2009, available online (in German) at: <http://www.bmas.de/portal/13148/ausbildungspakt.html>.
- Italian Action Programme for Re-employment (*Programma d’Azione per il Reimpiego*, PARI), available online (in Italian) at: <http://www.italialavoro.it/wps/portal/pari>.
- Kertesi, G., *Roma foglalkoztatás az ezredfordulón – A rendszerváltás maradandó sokkja* [Employment of the Roma at the end of the 20th century], Budapest working papers on the labour market (*Budapesti Munkagazdaságtani Füzetek*), Institute of Economics of Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Corvinus University of Budapest, 2005, available online (in Hungarian) at: <http://www.econ.core.hu/doc/bwp/bwp/Bwp0504.pdf>.
- Kertesi, G. and Varga, J., *Employment and educational attainment in Hungary*, Budapest working papers on the labour market, Institute of Economics of Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Corvinus University of Budapest, 2005.
- Larsson, L., Institute for Labour Market Policy Evaluation (*Institutet för arbetsmarknadspolitisk utvärdering*, IFAU), *Utvärdering av ungdomsätgärder*, Uppsala, 2000.
- Lyly-Yrjänäinen, M., European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), *Who needs up-skilling? Low-skilled and low-qualified workers in the European Union*, Dublin, Eurofound, 2008, available online at: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef0897.htm>.
- Mörth, I., Ortner, S. and Gusenbauer, M., *Niedrigqualifizierte in Oberösterreich – der Weg in die Weiterbildung* [Low-qualified workers in Upper Austria – the way towards further training], Linz, Abschlussbericht, 2005.
- Nilsson, P., Swedish Public Employment Service (*Arbetsförmedlingen*), *Programeffekter 1992 till 2006*, Working paper series 2008:1, Stockholm, 2008, available online (in Swedish) at: http://www.arbetsformedlingen.se/library/documents/rapporter/2008/workingpaper1_080516.pdf.

Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (*Kunnskapsdepartementet*), *The Competence Reform Report*, No. 42 to the Storting (national parliament) (1997–1998), available online at: http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/kd/Documents/Bills-and-white-papers/Reports-to-the-Storting/19971998/st-meld-nr-42_1997-98-summary_in.html?id=191807.

Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion (*Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet*), ‘Ruller ut kvalifiseringsprogrammet mot fattigdom’, press release, 2 November 2007, available online (in Norwegian) at: <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/aid/presesenter/pressemeldinger/2007/kvalifiseringsprogram.html?id=487539>.

O’Connell, P.J., Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), ‘Who generally trains? The effects of personal and workplace characteristics on training at work’, in Lassnigg, L. et al (eds), *Lifelong learning: Building bridges through transitional labour markets*, Apeldoorn, Belgium, Het Spinhuis, 2007, available online at: http://www.siswo.uva.nl/tlm/confbuda/papers/papers_files/WP4%20OConnell%20-%20Who%20Generally%20Trains.PDF.

Sirovátka, T., Horáková, M., Kulhavý, V. and Rákoczyová, M., *Zhodnocení rozsahu, cílenosti a účinků programů aktivní politiky zaměstnanosti* [Assessment of active employment policy programmes in terms of their scope, the degree to which they are targeted and their effects], Prague, Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs (*Výzkumný ústav práce a sociálních věcí, RILSA*), 2006.

Sirovátka, T. and Kulhavý, V., *Programy aktivní politiky zaměstnanosti v ČR v roce 2005: Hodnocení efektů na nezaměstnanost v roce 2006* [*Active employment policy programmes in 2005: Assessment of their effects on unemployment in 2006*], Prague, RILSA, 2007.

VOX, Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning, *Eksempelsamling – Opplæringstilbud til voksne med svak formell utdanning*, 2008, Oslo, available online (in Norwegian) at: http://www.vox.no/upload/7586/Eksempelsamling_SEC.pdf.

White, M. and Riley, R., *Findings from the macro evaluation of the New Deal for Young People*, Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Research Report No. 168, London, 2002.

Annex: Country codes

Country groups

EU15	15 EU Member States prior to enlargement in 2004 (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom (UK))
NMS	12 New Member States, 10 of which joined the EU in 2004 (Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) and the remaining two in 2007 (Bulgaria and Romania)
EU27	27 EU Member States

Country codes

Country code	Country name
AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
EL	Greece
ES	Spain
FI	Finland
FR	France
HU	Hungary
IE	Ireland
IT	Italy
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
LV	Latvia
MT	Malta
NL	Netherlands
NO	Norway, part of the EWCO network

PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
UK	United Kingdom

Terry Ward and Fadila Sanoussi (Applica) with Mats Kullander and Isabella Biletta (Eurofound)

EF/09/71/EN