



Eurofound

Very atypical work

Exploratory analysis of fourth European Working Conditions Survey

Background paper

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Contents

Introduction	1
From policy and legislation to research	1
Categorisation of very atypical work	7
Sociodemographic, sectoral, occupational and national characteristics	13
Working conditions of very atypical workers	20
Conclusions	28
References	29
Annex	32

Introduction

This background paper has been prepared to complement the findings of a comparative analysis by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) on what has been termed ‘very atypical work’ in the 27 European Union Member States (EU27). In the background paper, the definition of very atypical forms of work includes non-written employment contracts, contracts of less than 10 working hours a week and very short fixed-term contracts of six months or less. The comparative analytical report (Broughton et al, 2010) uses a similar categorisation, with the addition of zero-hour and on-call work contracts. However, it should be noted that the prevalence of very atypical forms of work may vary according to the definition adopted. In both reports, the term ‘non-standard work or employment’ is used interchangeably to refer to both atypical and very atypical work as opposed to standard employment, that is, full-time permanent employment.

Using different research methods, both reports explore the incidence and nature of very atypical forms of work and their association with a range of employment and working conditions outcomes. While the comparative analysis is based on structured contributions from Eurofound’s network of national correspondents in the EU27 and Norway, this background paper draws on data from the fourth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), conducted in 2005. It should be noted at the outset that the analysis presented in this background paper is exploratory in nature and is subject to the limitations of the EWCS questionnaire, which has a relatively narrow range of questions on forms of employment – being a broad survey on working conditions.

One issue that prompted this research was the increase in temporary employment from 1991 to 2005 in Europe and, especially, the finding from the fourth EWCS that a significant proportion of employees reported having no employment contract in 2005 (7% in the EU27). This proportion may be compared, for example, with the only 2% of workers on temporary agency work contracts. Traditionally, temporary jobs are found to be associated with less favourable working conditions. Against this background, this paper aims to determine the prevalence of very atypical forms of work in Europe and it explores to what extent they are correlated with a range of negative working conditions outcomes.

Neither the exploratory analysis of the fourth EWCS data nor the comparative analysis examines undeclared work, although it is recognised that very atypical and undeclared work may be related in many ways. Furthermore, an investigation of new forms of solo self-employment, subcontracting and pseudo self-employment or economically dependent work is outside the scope of this analysis due to the lack of relevant indicators in the fourth EWCS.

From policy and legislation to research

EU policy and legislative context

At European level, there has been a long tradition of legislation in the area of non-standard employment. In response to the increasing use of non-standard forms of employment in Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, EU legislation has provided a legal framework for non-standard employment contracts, recognising that workers on such contracts experience lower quality working conditions than permanent workers.

A draft directive on voluntary part-time work was submitted to the December 1981 European Council, but subsequently failed to find approval. Even an amended draft which was issued in January 1983 failed to make further progress. Draft legislation on temporary work issued in 1982 suffered a similar fate. In 1995, the European Commission launched consultations on ‘flexibility in working time and security for workers’ under the social policy agreement annexed to the Maastricht Treaty. According to the agreement, the Commission must consult with the social partners on new legislative proposals concerning social policy issues. As the European employer organisation BusinessEurope (formerly UNICE) was reluctant to debate part-time and fixed-term employment together, the social partners decided to start negotiations

on part-time work. A framework agreement on part-time work was signed on 6 June 1997 and implemented in **Council Directive 97/81/EC**¹, adopted by the Council of the European Union on 15 December 1997. In March 1999, the European social partners also signed a framework agreement on the rights of workers on fixed-term employment contracts; the Council of the European Union subsequently adopted **Council Directive 1999/70/EC**², transposing the agreement into EU legislation.

The policy debate on non-standard forms of employment was reopened in the aftermath of the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy in 2005. In accordance with the renewed Lisbon Strategy, the European Commission in its European Social Policy Agenda 2006–2010 emphasises the need to modernise Europe’s social model. One of the core employment objectives in the European Social Policy Agenda is to review labour law in order to address the needs created by new forms of employment – for example, short-term employment contracts.

In November 2006, the European Commission issued the Green Paper *Modernising labour law to meet the challenges of the 21st century* (COM(2006) 708), which highlights the ‘proliferation of atypical forms of contract’ as a major challenge posed by increased competition and globalisation. These non-standard forms of employment range from the most conventional fixed-term and temporary agency work contracts to less established – and potentially less protected – forms of employment, such as zero-hour contracts or on-call contracts, which are increasingly being used.

One year later, the European Commission published a follow-up Communication on the *Outcome of the public consultation on the Green Paper ‘Modernising labour law to meet the challenges of the 21st century’* (COM(2007) 627), which concluded that achieving a balance between security and flexibility (‘flexicurity’) is the way forward. However, the social partners had given a mixed response to the Green Paper. While BusinessEurope opposed suggestions of an EU-wide definition of ‘worker’ and rejected the focus on preservation of existing employment, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) emphasised the need to initiate an EU-level debate on how to adapt labour law with a view to providing fair and decent working conditions and labour standards for all workers. The ETUC General Secretary, John Monks, warned that any further delay in the publication of the Green Paper

*‘[...] would be interpreted as yet another signal that the Commission is more concerned about the interests of business than the interests of citizens and workers. [...] A Green Paper is supposed to start a debate. ETUC is ready for such a debate.’*³

Thus, a divergence of views is apparent between the parties involved in the consultation: national authorities, trade unions and employer organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), enterprises, legal experts and the general public. Nevertheless, the major points of the consensus concern the need for ‘clarification of the nature of the employment relationship’ as well as ‘the rights and obligations of the parties involved in subcontracting chains, to avoid depriving workers of their ability to make effective use of their rights’. In light of these conclusions, a preliminary step towards improved cooperation and greater clarity is the monitoring and further analysis of labour market trends in relation to new and emerging forms of employment that might push some workers into a vulnerable position, primarily women, young people and older persons.

¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31997L0081:EN:HTML>.

² <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31999L0070:EN:HTML>.

³ ETUC press release, 12 October 2006, Brussels, available online at: http://www.etuc.org/IMG/pdf/92Letter_Barroso_on_Green_Paper_Labour_law_1210061a.pdf.

Research background

Over the last decade, Eurofound research has contributed significantly to the EU policy debate on the implications of the increase in non-standard employment. The correlation between these forms of employment and poorer working conditions outcomes is emphasised in the 2002 Eurofound paper *Quality of work and employment in Europe: Issues and challenges*, which outlines an analytical framework for quality of work and employment on which most of the Eurofound research in this field is based.⁴ Evidence of this link comes mainly from Eurofound research based on secondary analysis of EWCS data.

Secondary analysis of the third EWCS data on *Employment status and working conditions* (Goudswaard and Andries, 2002) suggests that working conditions of non-standard workers – non-permanent and part-time workers – are worse than those of permanent workers. In general, non-permanent workers are found to have less secure income, perform less skilled work and/or have less access to training. Permanent employees face higher psychosocial job demands than non-permanent workers and full-time employees face higher job demands than part-time employees. However, when looking at the combination of job control and job demands, a relatively high proportion of high-strain jobs is found among full-time workers with a non-permanent contract.

Other Eurofound research exploring the connections between work organisation and working conditions (Daubas-Letourneux and Thébaud-Mony, 2003) reveals that non-permanent and involuntary part-time employment contracts are overrepresented in the type of work organisation called ‘constrained work’. Such work is characterised by an absence of autonomy at work, the impossibility of holding discussions about working conditions or work organisation in general, and a lack of demands in the work. This form of work organisation is typically found in unclassified and unskilled manual jobs and has the highest proportion of women in the youngest (under 25 years) and oldest (55 years and over) age groups.

Another aspect that is frequently discussed relates to individual career paths and whether these forms of employment serve as a stepping stone to permanent jobs. An earlier Eurofound comparative study on non-permanent employment, quality of work and industrial relations (Scheele, 2002) highlights that, in most countries, the long-term career prospects of non-permanent employees seem to vary according to their educational level, income opportunities and job; nonetheless, the report states that reliable data on this issue appear inconclusive. The study also points out that there is contradictory evidence on whether non-permanent employment improves the employability of unemployed people, helping them to enter open-ended employment, or leads only to more non-permanent employment or further spells of unemployment.

Other research has explored the implications of non-standard employment for employment stability and career paths. For example, the *OECD Employment Outlook 2006*, published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2006), recognises that temporary jobs are not always a voluntary choice for some workers and do not necessarily serve as entry ports into permanent and stable employment. Instead, the risk for workers is of being trapped in situations of employment instability and income insecurity. However, the evidence is not unambiguous. Gash (2008), using European Community Household Panel (ECHP) data spanning a period from 1995 to 2001, shows that temporary workers are more likely to get permanent jobs than to drop out of the labour market, although wide variations arise between countries. For Güell and Petrangolo (2000), the ‘good matches’ eventually move out of temporary employment into permanent employment; in other words, when workers find a suitable job that matches their skills, they are more likely to be retained.

⁴ The Eurofound analytical framework on quality of work and employment encompasses four key dimensions: career and employment security, health and well-being of workers, skills development and work–life balance.

There are also growing concerns in relation to the use of non-standard employment contracts in terms of implications for the well-being and health of workers. Using the Delphi method⁵, the Risk Observatory of the European Agency for Health and Safety at work (EU-OSHA, 2007) has conducted an expert survey on new emerging workplace risks. So-called ‘precarious contracts’, such as temporary or on-call contracts, rank high on the list of the top 10 emerging workplace risks (Table 1). According to the expert survey, workers on precarious contracts tend to work in poorer conditions and receive less occupational safety and health (OSH) training.

Table 1: *New emerging risks identified (EU-OSHA expert forecast)*

Top 10 risks	No.	Mean value	Standard deviation
Precarious contracts in context of unstable labour market	16	4.56	0.51
Increased worker vulnerability in context of globalisation	16	4.38	0.72
New forms of employment contracts	16	4.25	0.68
Feeling of job insecurity	16	4.25	0.77
Ageing workforce	16	4.19	0.54
Long working hours	16	4.13	0.62
Work intensification	15	4.07	1.03
Lean production and outsourcing	16	4.06	0.68
High emotional demands at work	16	4	0.52
Poor work–life balance	16	4	0.73

Notes: *No.* refers to the number of the sample. Mean values on a scale of 1 to 5. Mean value > 4: risk strongly agreed as emerging; mean value between 3.25 and 4: risk agreed as emerging.

Source: *European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), 2007*

Recent OECD research (2008) has also assessed to what extent employment patterns or working conditions may cause or aggravate mental illness. The evidence indicates that the type of employment is an important determinant of mental well-being. Switching from standard to non-standard employment, measured by the type of contract or working hours, has an adverse effect on mental health. In terms of occupations, unskilled workers show the highest incidence of work-related mental illness. Longitudinal analysis for individual workers in five OECD countries (Australia, Canada, Korea, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (UK)) reveals that unemployment or economic inactivity is more strongly correlated with a decline in mental health than employment, regardless of the type of employment.

Until now, limited attempts have been made to empirically gauge the incidence and consequences of the more extreme forms of atypical work. It should be noted that the way that non-standard employment is conceptualised varies between research studies, which makes it difficult to draw comparisons between research findings. Most of the research has focused on the effects of non-standard employment on career stability, mainly based on longitudinal data sources, as well as focusing – to a lesser extent – on the consequences in terms of health and well-being.

Temporary employment: trends and challenges

A glance at trends in the recourse to temporary jobs across Europe confirms that temporary employment – that is, fixed-term and temporary agency work – has become more prevalent in the majority of the EU countries over the last 15 years (European Labour Force Surveys (LFS), 1990–2005). National sources collected through the European Industrial

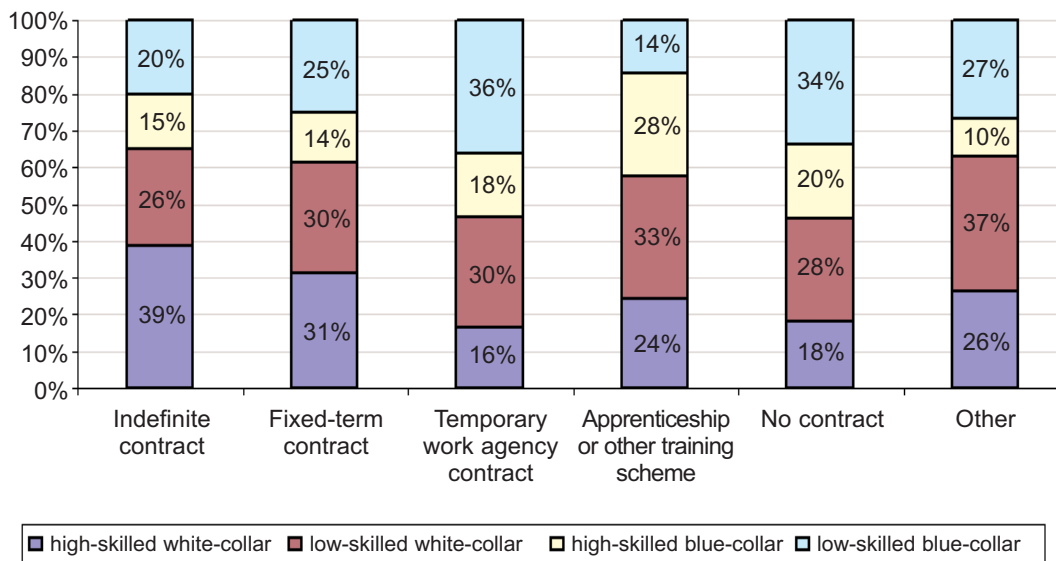
⁵ The Delphi method is a systematic, interactive forecasting method which relies on a panel of experts.

Relations Observatory (EIRO) also give an indication of the extent to which successive waves of labour market reform have introduced new contractual forms with the aim of increasing labour market flexibility. Some authors regard the process of labour market flexibilisation as a ‘partial and targeted deregulation’ (Esping-Andersen and Regini, 2000) aimed at new entrants and young people; this appears to be particularly the case in Spain, Italy and France. On the other hand, the *OECD Employment Outlook 2006* refers to the deregulation of the labour market as a ‘partial reform strategy’ (OECD, 2006), shifting the emphasis onto the skill divide in the workforce: skilled-protected jobs versus unskilled-deregulated and potentially precarious jobs.

A considerable volume of literature has identified the specific characteristics associated with temporary employment; evidence from the fourth EWCS suggests that temporary employment contracts (fixed-term and temporary agency work) as well as no contracts are often associated with low-qualified jobs, limited access to training and poor career prospects.

As Figure 1 indicates, employees holding a permanent or indefinite contract are more represented in high-skilled white-collar occupations than employees with temporary contracts or no contracts. The relatively high proportion of high-skilled white-collar workers reporting having no employment contract (18%) gives an indication of the heterogeneity of the group of respondents without a contract. Temporary agency workers and employees with no contracts are more likely to work in low-skilled blue-collar occupations (36% and 34% respectively). Recent Eurofound research (Lyly-Yrjanainen, 2008) confirms that both low-skilled workers⁶ and low-qualified workers⁷ are more likely to be employed on fixed-term contracts and without a contract than other groups of workers.

Figure 1: Occupational distribution by type of employment contract, EU27 (%)



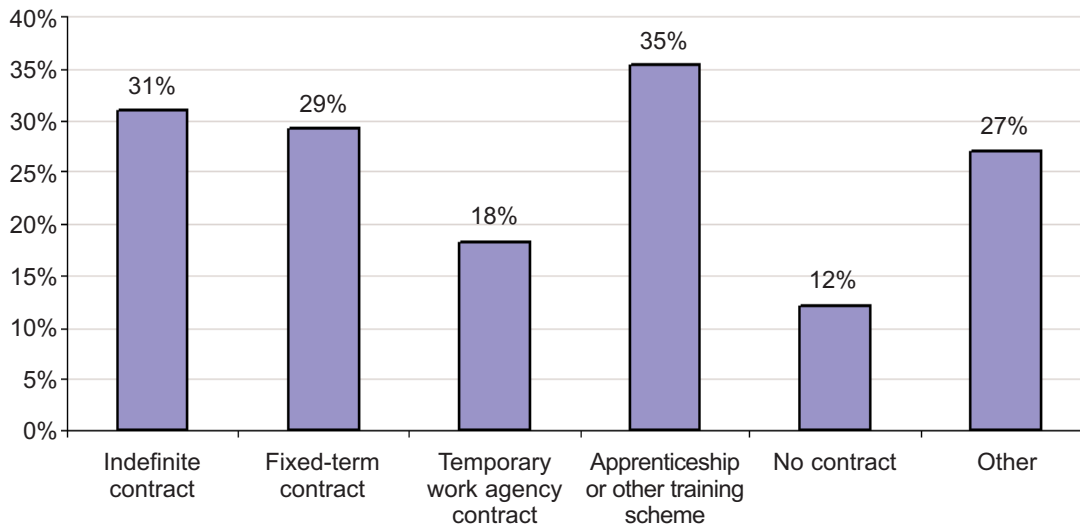
Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

⁶ Low-skilled workers are defined as workers in elementary occupations – ISCO 5–9, according to the International Standard Classification of Occupations.

⁷ Low-qualified workers are defined as workers who have basic educational levels – ISCED 0–2, according to the International Standard Classification of Education.

Shifting the focus to access to training – a key dimension of employability – Figure 2 shows that levels of training paid for or provided by the employer in the previous 12-month period appear to be particularly low for employees holding a temporary agency work contract (18%) and those having no contract (12%). Given the limited duration and higher turnover of non-standard workers, employers appear to have fewer incentives to invest in training.

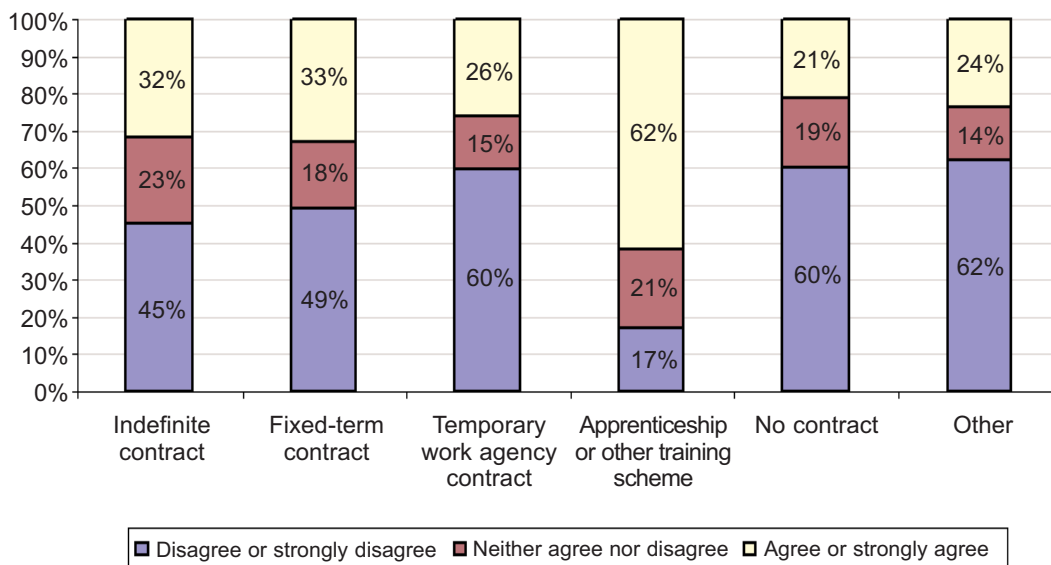
Figure 2: Training, by type of employment contract, EU27 (%)



Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

Figure 3 shows a correlation between the type of employment contract and possibilities for career advancement. Employees with temporary contracts or no contract are less optimistic about the possibilities for career progression offered by their job than their counterparts on permanent employment contracts. Empirical findings from other studies confirm the strong negative long-term implications of non-standard employment for career opportunities (Barbieri and Scherer, 2009).

Figure 3: Employees agreeing or disagreeing that their job offers good prospects for career advancement, EU27 (%)



Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

Based on exploratory analysis of the fourth EWCS data, the following chapters will introduce a tentative categorisation of very atypical forms of work in an attempt to assess their incidence according to sociodemographic variables. The report will then explore possible correlations between these forms of employment and certain working conditions outcomes.

Categorisation of very atypical work

Definitions and concepts

According to Eurofound's European Industrial Relations Dictionary, 'atypical [or non-standard] work refers to employment relationships not conforming to the standard or "typical" model of full-time, regular, open-ended employment with a single employer over a long time span.'⁸

Non-standard forms of employment are often regarded as a means of achieving numerical labour market flexibility, especially in countries with a high level of employment protection legislation.⁹ Notably, in some southern European countries, such as Italy and Spain, temporary employment has been used to bypass strict employment protection legislation applied to permanent work.

In an attempt to draw a categorisation of very atypical forms of work, all employment contracts departing from the 'standard' form of employment – that is, a permanent full-time job – may be classified as non-standard. The further the contracts depart from the reference standard employment contract, the more non-standard they are. Based on the principle of 'absolute' divergence from the standard employment relationship, a tentative categorisation of 'very' atypical forms of work will be outlined using the fourth EWCS data. This includes three main categories of workers:

- workers who have no employment contract;
- workers who report working a very small number of hours (less than 10 hours a week);
- workers who hold a temporary employment contract of a duration of six months or less.

Any worker who meets any of the above criteria is considered for the purpose of this paper as being in very atypical work.

Before exploring the incidence of these forms of employment and the implications for working conditions, it is important to explain in what way they are regarded as very atypical. In the first place, it should be emphasised that the notion of what is atypical and very atypical work may vary between countries. This applies, in particular, to the 'no contract' category. It may be that in countries with a high proportion of workers without an employment contract (see Figure 4) the employment legislation foresees such an arrangement, albeit for a short duration; for example, in Estonia, labour legislation allows employers to use oral contracts if the employment period is shorter than two weeks.

⁸ <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/industrialrelations/dictionary/definitions/ATYPICALWORK.htm>.

⁹ According to the OECD definition, 'employment protection refers both to regulations concerning hiring (e.g. rules favouring disadvantaged groups, conditions for using temporary or fixed-term contracts, training requirements) and firing (e.g. redundancy procedures, mandated prenotification periods and severance payments, special requirements for collective dismissals and short-time work schemes)' (*OECD Employment Outlook 1999*, Chapter 2, 'Employment protection and labour market performance', p. 50).

Part-time work is frequently associated with the emergence of other non-standard forms of employment – notably fixed-term contracts and temporary agency work – and it is regulated and practised in a different manner in different countries. Regardless of the provisions set out in national employment legislation, working less than 10 hours a week, by all accounts, diverges from both standard and non-standard employment.

In relation to the category of workers with a contract of short duration, in some countries an employment contract of less than a year is not necessarily regarded as very uncommon, while in other countries this may be the case. However, it is interesting to note that the vast majority (over 70%) of workers with a short employment contract of less than a year report having a contract of six months or less.

Data limitations

Although the fourth EWCS enables a preliminary analysis of the incidence of very atypical forms of work, there are obvious limitations in the dataset. Other employment contracts or arrangements that would fall in the category of very atypical forms of employment – such as on-call or zero-hour contracts, dependent self-employment, subcontracting and pseudo self-employment – are out of the scope of this exploratory analysis, despite their relevance. These forms of employment are not considered in the fourth EWCS survey; hence, it is not possible to explore either their incidence or their characteristics.

With a sample of 1,000 interviews in most countries and 600 interviews in the smaller Member States of Cyprus, Estonia, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovenia, it is difficult to capture very atypical work in all its facets. Moreover, country differences in legislation and employment practices prevent an analysis from drawing an overall picture in this regard. When exploring trends in non-standard employment, the main question is generally whether such contracts act as stepping stones towards permanent employment or are an ‘employment trap’ whereby a worker is trapped in a chain of consecutive temporary employment contracts. The fourth EWCS cannot answer this crucial question as it does not provide data on the work history of respondents and the duration of unemployment spells.

Extent of very atypical work

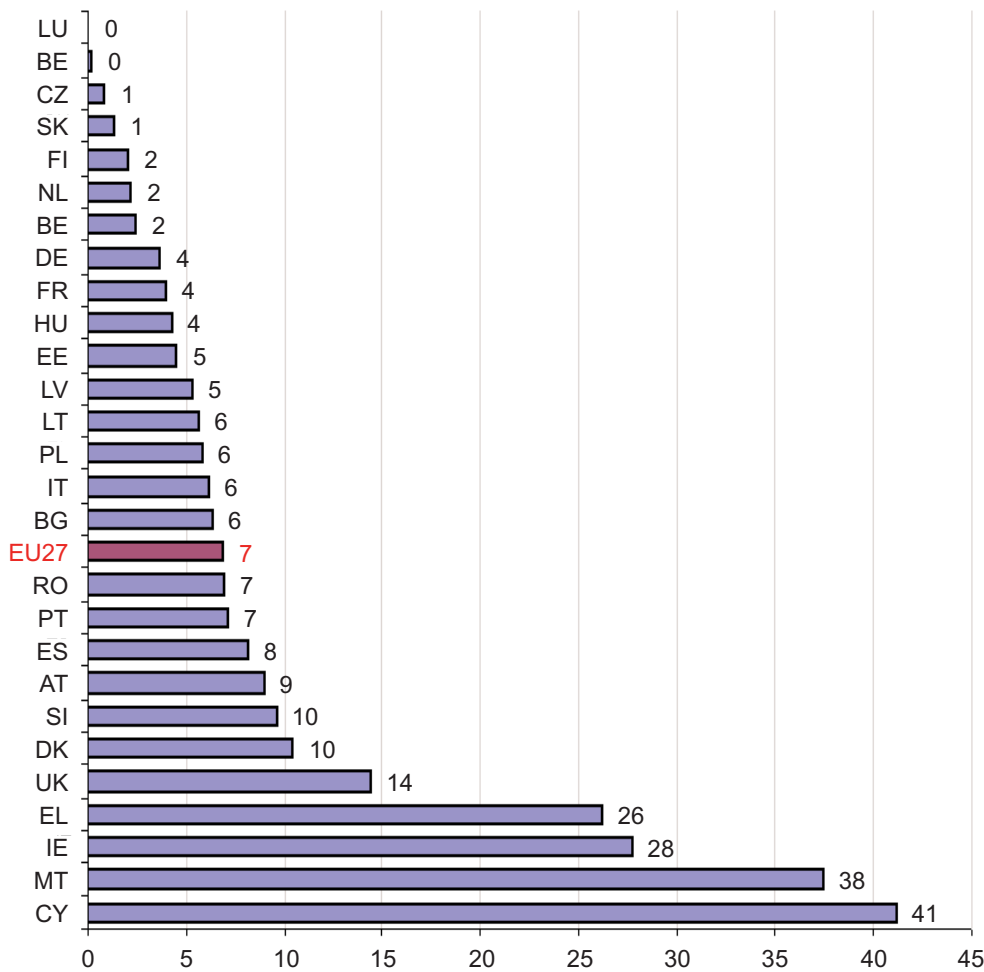
Employees with no contract

The question on type of employment (Q3b: What kind of employment contract do you have?) was amended to include the item ‘no contract’ in the 2005 EWCS survey questionnaire. Therefore, no time trends can be outlined for the 15-year period over which the survey has been running.

On average in the EU27, employees without a contract account for about 7% of employment. However, this average hides significant variations between countries, as Figure 4 shows. Cyprus has the highest proportion of such employees (41%), followed by Malta (38%), Ireland (28%) and Greece (26%). Of the bigger countries, the UK has a high proportion of such employees (14%). In some of these Member States – Greece, Ireland and the UK – employees without contracts are most prevalent in the economic sectors of agriculture, hotels and restaurants, and construction.

Although work performed without an employment contract is often regarded as a possible form of undeclared work, the EWCS 2005 data do not enable an analysis to shed light into the relationship between undeclared work and working without a contract.

Figure 4: No employment contract, by country (% of all employees)

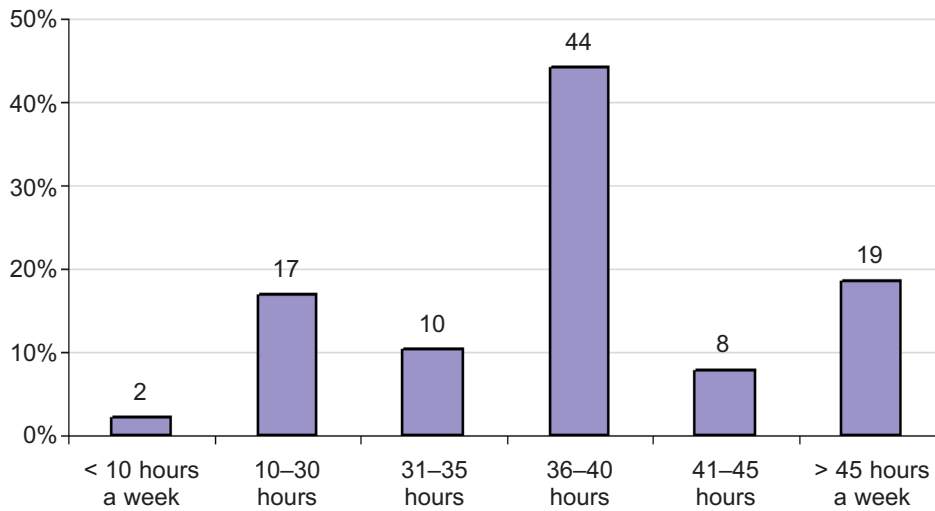


Note: See Annex for list of country codes.
Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

Employees working a very small number of hours

Almost half of European employees (44%) work between 36 and 40 hours a week (Figure 5). At the two ends of the spectrum, 19% of employees report working longer than 45 hours a week and 2% work less than 10 hours a week. The assumption is that those working less than 10 hours a week, which is very short part-time work, fall into the category of very atypical workers. However, such a negligible proportion cannot be disaggregated further according to type of employment contract and other variables. Other national sources may shed light on this matter.

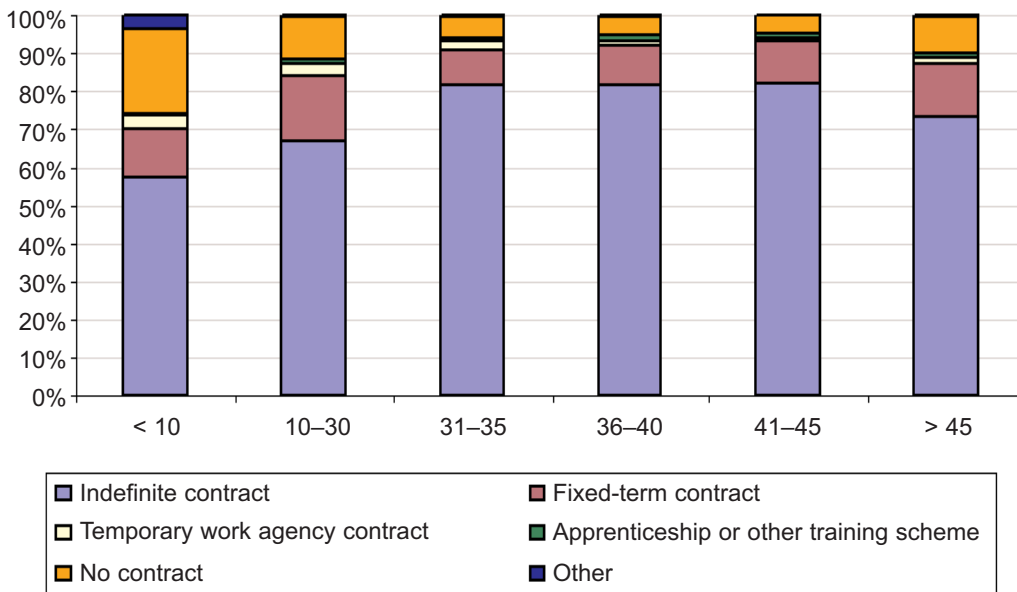
Figure 5: Employees, by number of hours worked in main job, EU27 (%)



Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

Figure 6 illustrates the distribution of working hours according to type of employment contract. A significant proportion of employees without a contract (22.2%) report working less than 10 hours a week. A lower proportion of such employees (9.6%) report working longer than 45 hours a week compared with the average proportion of employees working such hours (19%).

Figure 6: Working hours, by type of employment contract, EU27 (%)

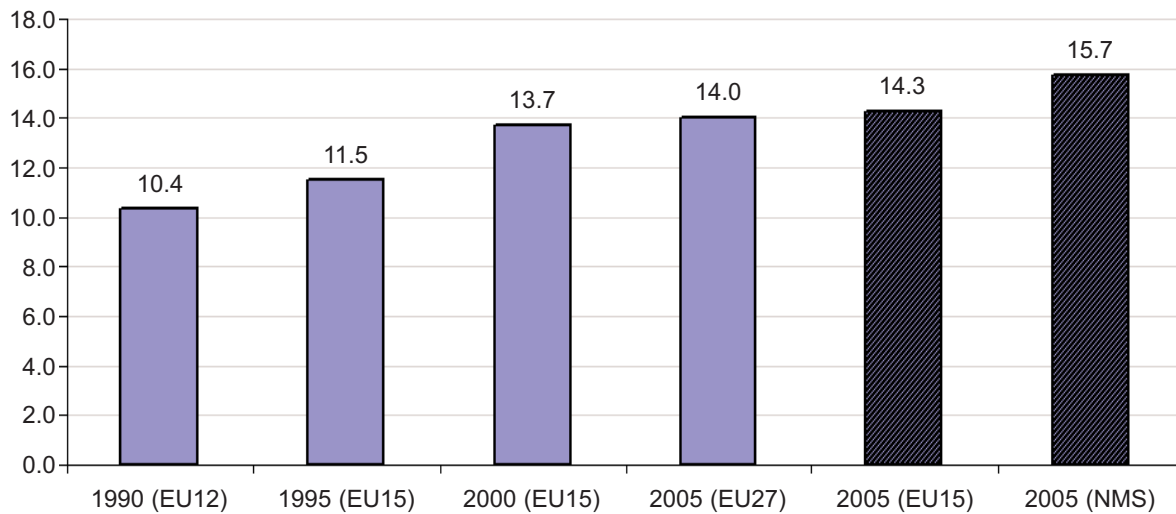


Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

Employees holding temporary contract of less than a year

Trend data from the European LFS (Eurostat, 1990–2005) show that the period between 1990 and 2005 saw an increase in temporary employment, defined as work on a fixed-term or temporary agency work contract. Figure 7 reveals that the upward trend is more apparent between 1990 and 2000, and seems to have slowed down afterwards, especially in the 15 EU Member States before EU enlargement in 2004 (EU15). The increase in temporary employment is most notable in the new Member States (NMS) that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, where the proportion of employees in temporary employment rose from 6% in 2000 to over 15% in 2005.

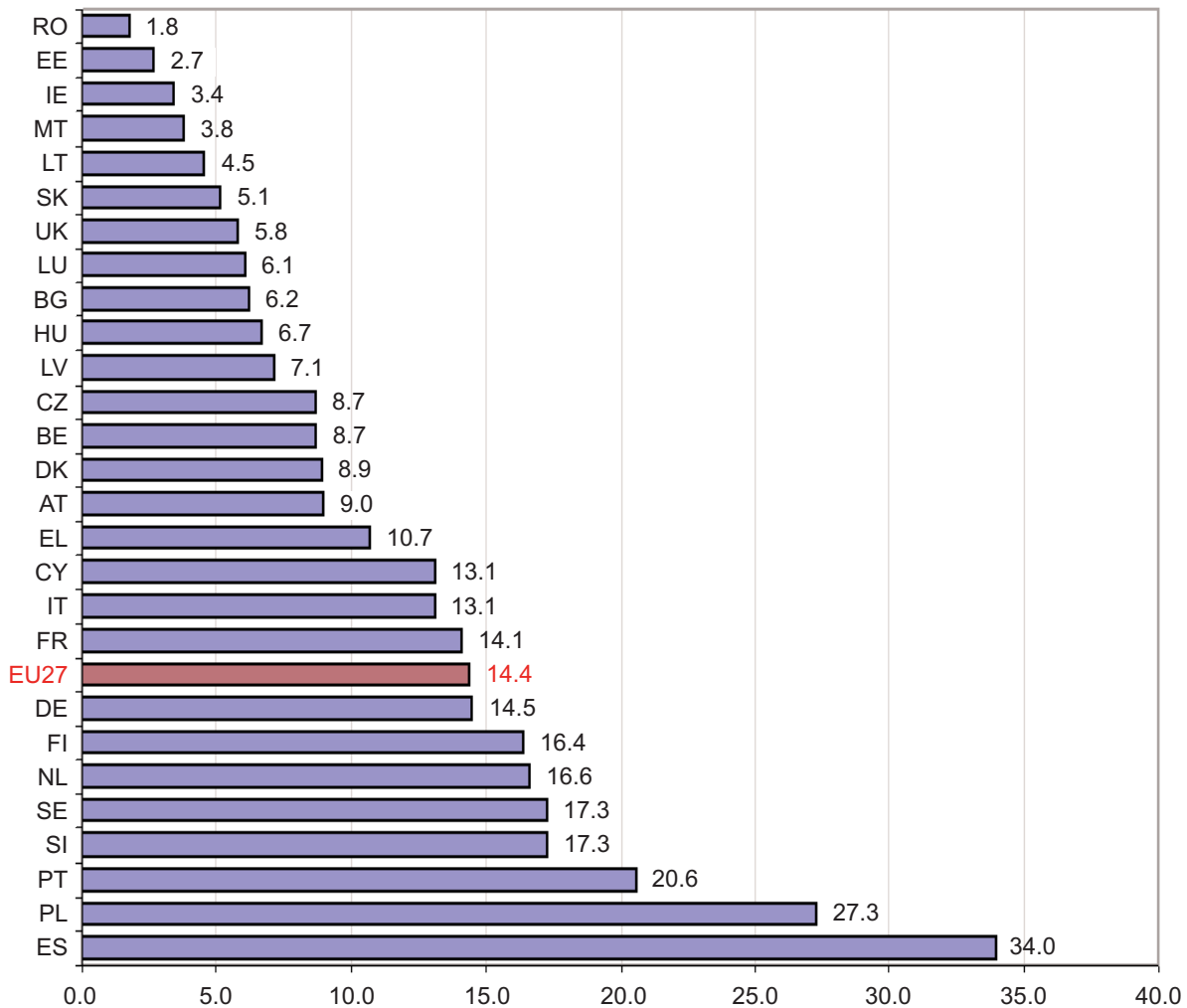
Figure 7: *Temporary employment, by country type, 1990–2005 (%)*



Notes: In 1990, there were only 12 EU Member States (EU12), before the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden. See Annex for more detail on country groups.
 Source: Eurostat, European LFS, 1990–2005

Country differences in the distribution of temporary employment are significant. Figure 8 shows the country breakdown from the European LFS (Eurostat, 2006). A higher than average incidence of temporary employment is reported in Spain (34%), Poland (27.3%), Portugal (20.6%), Slovenia (17.3%), Sweden (17.3%), the Netherlands (16.6%) and Finland (16.4%). Germany is almost at the EU27 average (14.5%, compared with the average of 14.4%).

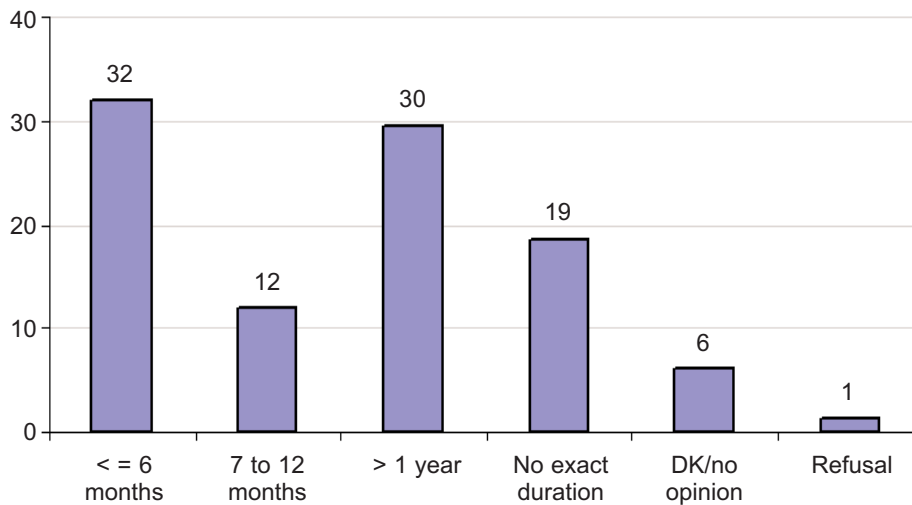
Figure 8: Temporary employment contracts, by country (% of all employees)



Source: Eurostat, European LFS, 2006

Within temporary employment, a contract for less than one year may be regarded as a more pronounced form of non-standard employment. Overall in Europe, 44% of employees report having a temporary contract of less than a year. More specifically, 32% of temporary employees have a contract of six months or less and another 12% have a contract of seven to 12 months (Figure 9). Furthermore, while the response percentages of ‘don’t know’ and refusals to answer the question are often omitted in data analysis, they are, in this case, suggestive and may be an indication of very atypical employment. From the country breakdowns, it can be seen that Spain has the highest proportion of employees with a contract lasting less than a year. However, it is important to note that, when using the fourth EWCS data, the number of observations for respondents reporting having an employment contract of less than a year is generally too small to allow statistically robust results.

Figure 9: Duration of employment contract in number of months or years, EU27 (%)



Notes: DK = A response of 'don't know'. A refusal indicates respondents who refused to answer the question.
Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

Differences between atypical, very atypical and standard work

After explaining the rationale of the inclusion of the above employment contracts or arrangements in the category of very atypical forms of work, the analysis will continue, differentiating systematically between:

- standard employment – meaning an indefinite, full-time employment contract, which is taken as the reference category (representing 76% of all employees);
- atypical employment – referring to a temporary agency work or fixed-term employment contract of a duration of more than six months (14%);
- very atypical employment – meaning no contract, very short working hours amounting to less than 10 hours a week (very short part-time work) and/or a temporary employment contract (temporary agency work or fixed-term) of six months or less (6%);
- a residual category – including apprenticeships, other non-specified contracts, don't knows and refusals to answer Q3b in the EWCS (4%). Apart from the apprentices, it may be that a proportion of workers falling into this residual category are very atypical workers. Nonetheless, on the basis of the data available, it is more cautious to keep this category separate because it is not possible to provide exact figures on what proportion of these respondents are actually very atypical workers.

Sociodemographic, sectoral, occupational and national characteristics

Before exploring the working conditions of very atypical workers, it is interesting first to examine the distribution of such employees according to sociodemographic characteristics, economic sector, occupation and country.

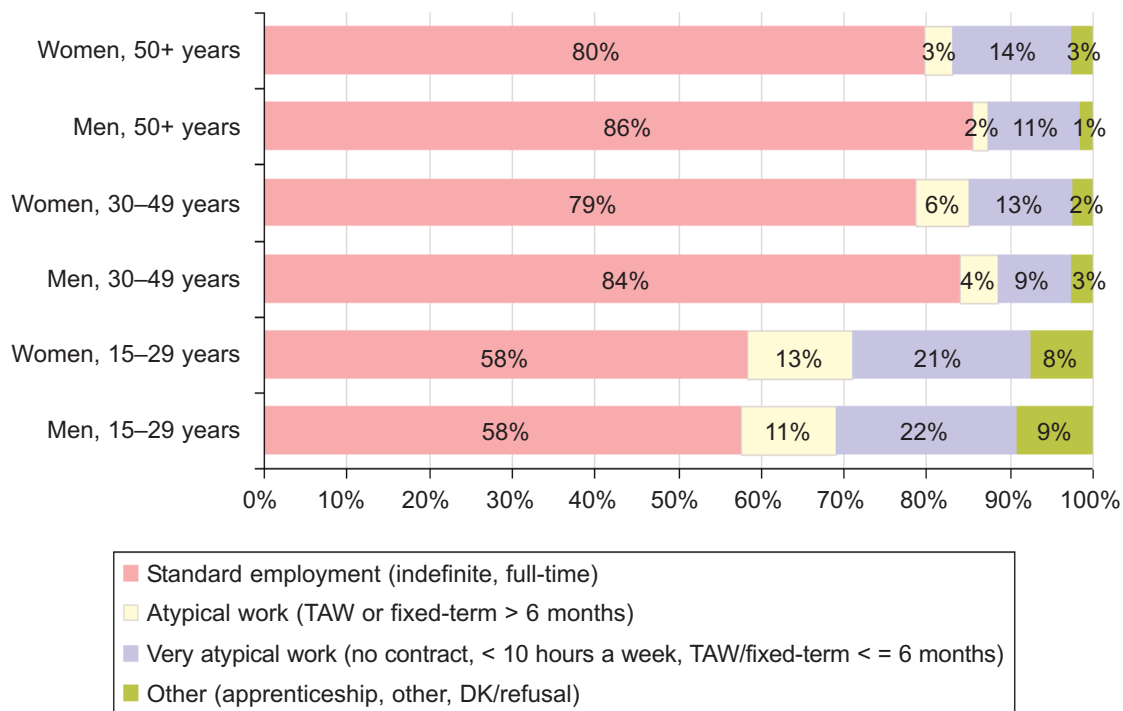
Age and gender

Figure 10 shows that younger workers aged 15 to 29 years are the most represented age group in the category of very atypical workers. Previous studies confirm that particularly younger people – as one potential group of labour market 'outsiders' – are more likely to be found in temporary employment (Schömann et al, 1998; Kahn, 2005). However, an analysis of the fourth EWCS data also shows that older age does not necessarily offer protection from falling into the

category of very atypical forms of work. One explanation for the comparatively significant proportion of older workers in very atypical forms of work is that they are more likely to possess outdated skills or limited information and communication technology (ICT) skills than other workers or they may simply opt for certain work arrangements – such as working less than 10 hours a week – as a form of pre-retirement.

From a gender perspective, a similar proportion of men (22%) and women (21%) aged 15 to 29 years hold very atypical contracts or have atypical work arrangements. However, the gender gap in relation to very atypical work is wider in the older age groups, to the disadvantage of women, standing at four percentage points for the 30–49 age group and three percentage points for those aged 50 years or more.

Figure 10: Standard and non-standard forms of work, by age and gender, EU27 (%)



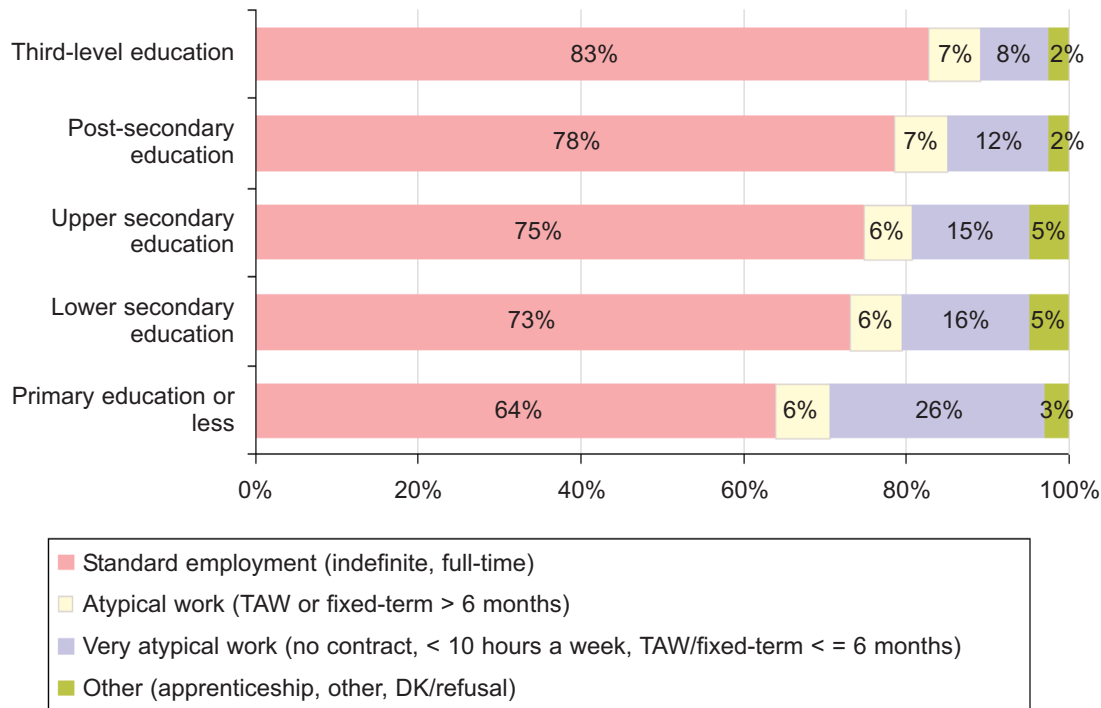
Note: TAW = temporary agency work.
Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

The relatively high incidence of the youngest and oldest workers in the category of very atypical workers sounds a note of warning in the context of demographic change which necessitates facilitating and encouraging the entry and retention of both young and older people in the labour market. Drawing from ECHP data, D’Addio and Rosholm (2004) demonstrate that in many cases the youngest and the oldest workers who hold temporary jobs are at higher risk of exclusion from the labour market. In addition, particular attention should be paid to other vulnerable categories in the labour market, such as women across all age groups, especially in a context where the increasing participation of women in the labour market can contribute to alleviating the problem of an ageing population.

Educational level

Higher educational levels tend to enhance workers’ chances of being in permanent employment, while those with primary education only have the greatest risk of falling into the category of very atypical workers (Figure 11). It is important to note, however, that the low educational level may be partly explained by the fact that younger people – who are overrepresented in the category of very atypical workers – may still be studying or may not yet have completed higher level education.

Figure 11: Standard and non-standard forms of work, by educational level, EU27 (%)



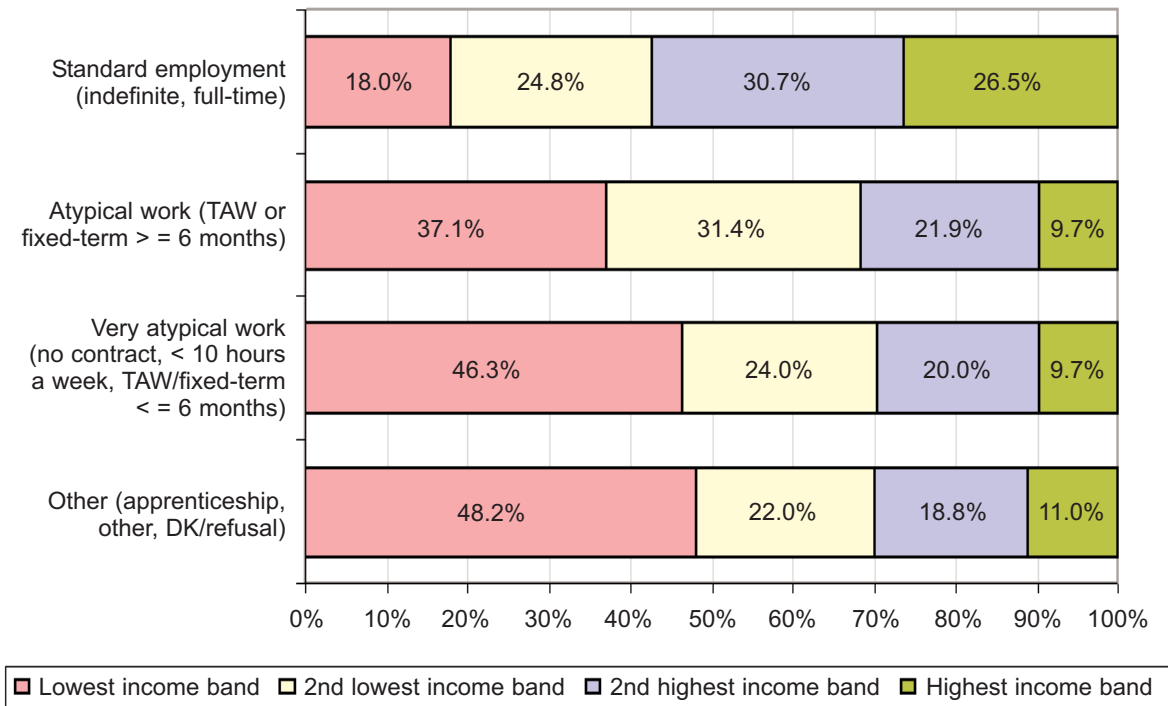
Note: Educational levels based on ISCED.
 Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

Income level

Employment status, as well as occupation, appears to be one of the most important determinants of income level. In general, workers in very atypical forms of work are more likely to fall into the lower income categories than workers in permanent, full-time employment and – albeit to a lesser extent – other non-standard workers holding fixed-term or temporary agency work contracts lasting more than six months (Figure 12).

Empirical evidence from OECD research indicates that temporary jobs tend to provide less favourable conditions than permanent ones, especially in relation to wages. When controlling for differences in individual and job characteristics, temporary employment is found to be associated with a wage penalty of up to 24% in the Netherlands and averaging about 15% in a number of EU countries (OECD, 2002).

Figure 12: Standard and non-standard forms of work, by income, EU27 (%)



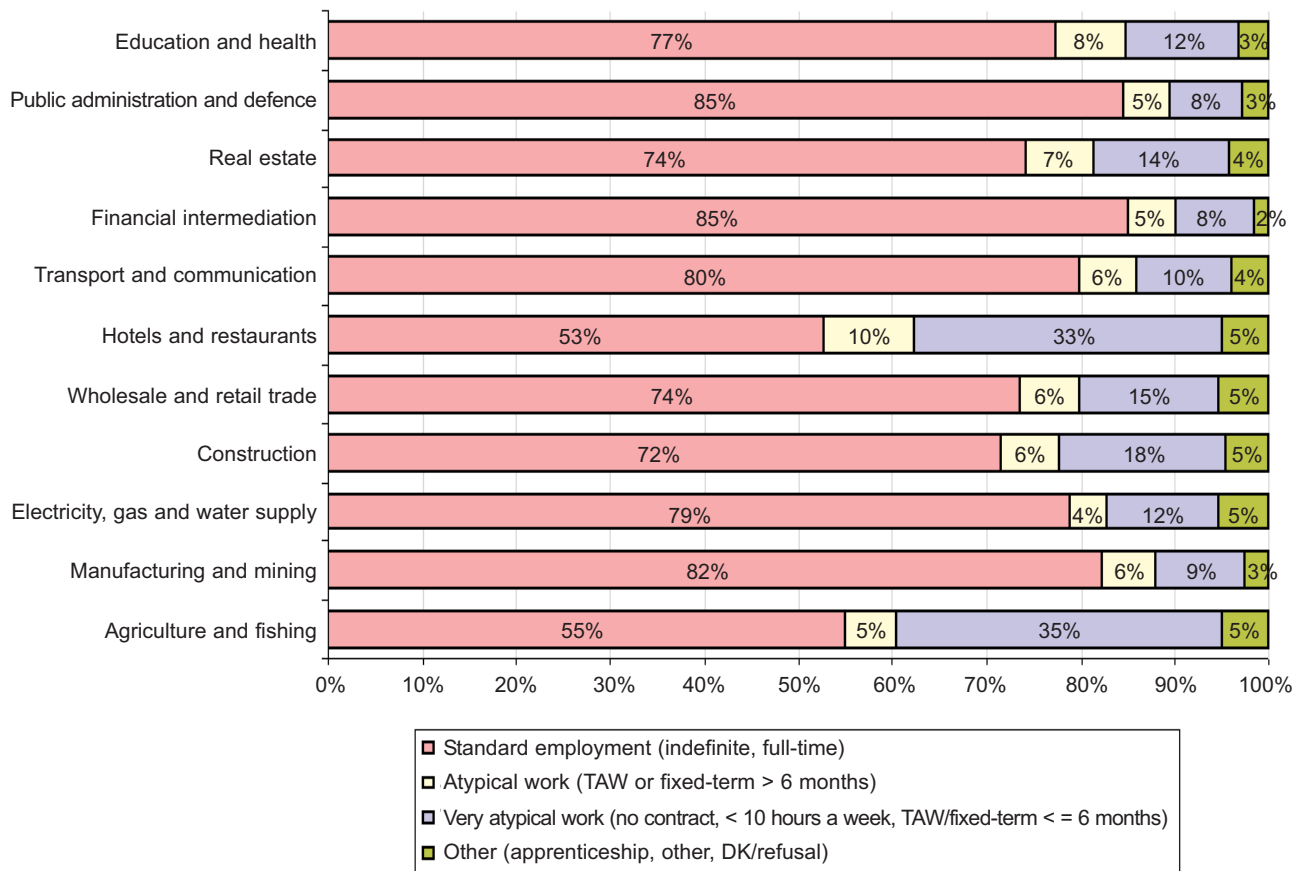
Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

Sectoral distribution

In terms of economic sector, agriculture and hotels and restaurants have by far the highest concentration of very atypical workers (Figure 13). It should be noted that these sectors have the most employees without contracts (Parent-Thirion et al, 2007). A substantial proportion of workers in very atypical forms of work are also found in the construction, wholesale and retail trade, and real estate sectors.

The high incidence of very atypical forms of work in some of these sectors – notably, agriculture, hotels and restaurants, and construction – may be associated with seasonal work. In these sectors, it is often the case that the nature of the job is short term. However, seasonality varies within subsectors. For example, within the hotels and restaurants sector, seasonal work is high in camping and short-stay accommodation while it tends to be lower than average in canteens, catering, bars, restaurants and the fast food industry (Klein Hesselink et al, 2004).

Figure 13: Standard and non-standard forms of work, by sector, EU27 (%)



Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

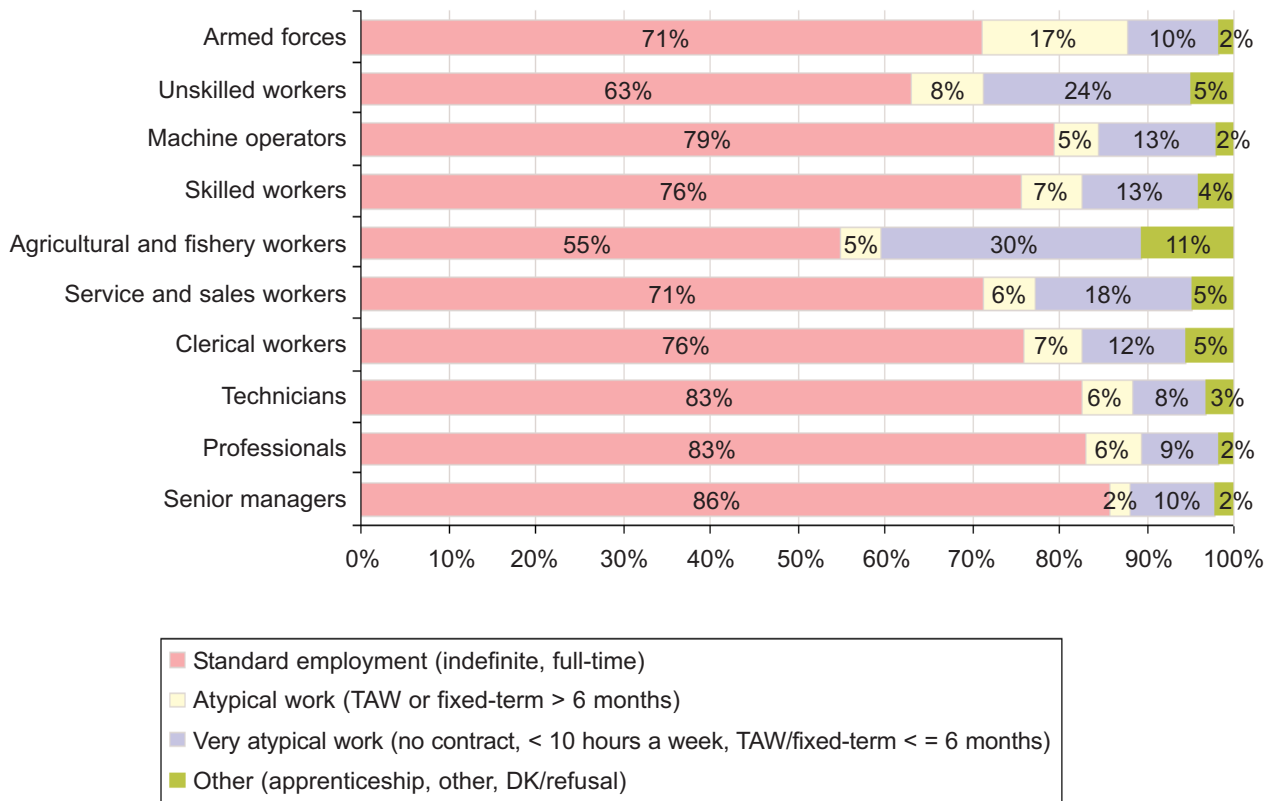
Occupational distribution

Looking at occupational categories (Figure 14), 30% of agricultural workers are found in very atypical forms of work. This finding, however, may be due to a sector effect and, as indicated earlier, the large amount of seasonal work in the agricultural sector.

In addition, a sizeable proportion of unskilled workers (24%) and – to a lesser extent – service and sales workers (18%) are found in very atypical employment relationships. This finding partly mirrors the sectoral distribution. For example, both unskilled and service and sales workers predominate in the wholesale and retail trade sector, which also has a high proportion of employees on very atypical contracts or with atypical work arrangements (15%).

A comparatively high proportion of senior managers (10%), professionals (9%) and technicians (8%) are in the category of very atypical workers. Hence, being employed in a low-skilled occupation may increase the risk of employment precariousness; however, having a higher occupational level is not necessarily a guarantee of more stable and secure employment.

Figure 14: Standard and non-standard forms of work, by occupation, EU27 (%)

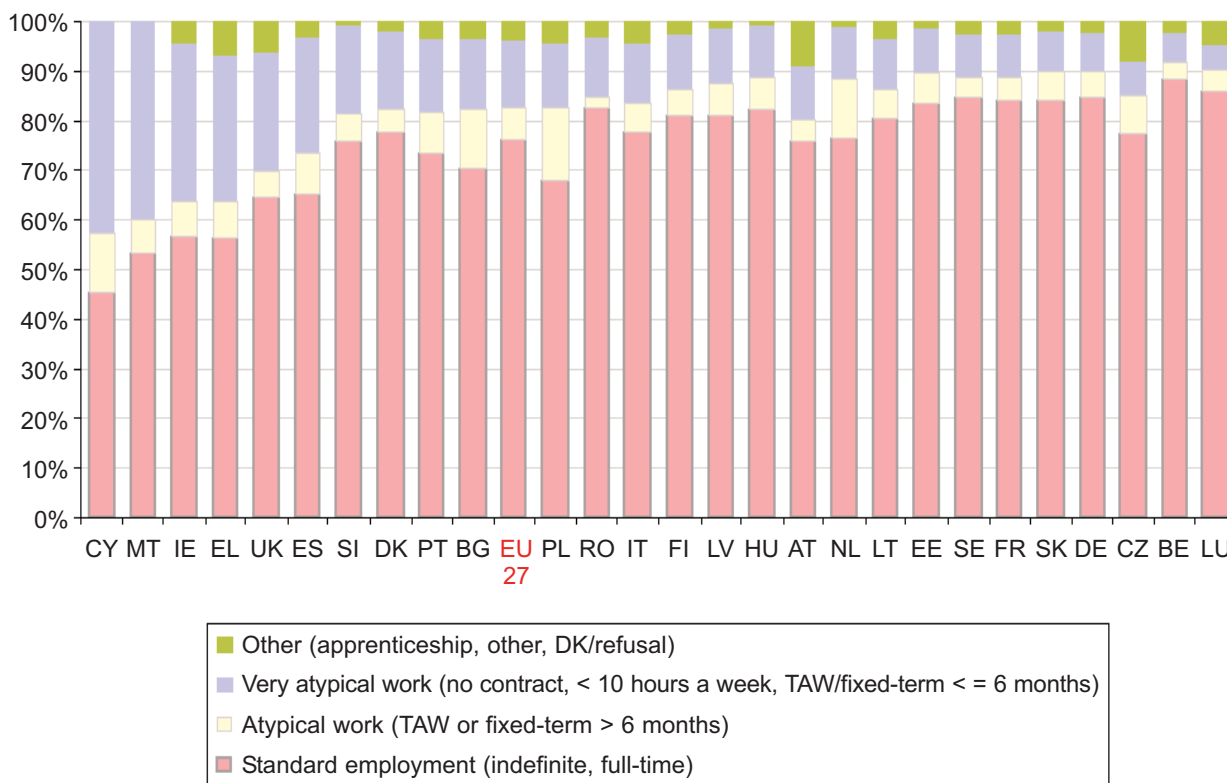


Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

Country differences

From a country perspective, Cyprus (43%) and Malta (40%) have the highest levels of very atypical workers (Figure 15). Other countries with a higher than average proportion of these employees are Ireland (32%), Greece (30%), the UK (24%), Spain (23%), Slovenia (17%) and Denmark (16%). This country distribution largely reflects national variations in answers to the ‘no contract’ question in the fourth EWCS: Cyprus, Malta, Greece, Ireland and the UK have the highest rates of very atypical workers and higher than average proportions of workers reporting having no contract. Looking at the proportion of workers in a more conventional non-standard employment relationship – fixed-term and temporary agency work contracts of a duration of more than six months – the positions of the countries change, with Poland (15%) at the top of the list followed by the Netherlands (12%), Bulgaria (12%) and Cyprus (11%).

Figure 15: Standard and non-standard forms of work, by country (%)



Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

Profile of very atypical worker

It is not easy to sketch the profile of a very atypical worker because this category of workers is a highly diversified and heterogeneous group.

Despite the limitations of this analysis, it can be said that overall the youngest and oldest workers are more likely to be employed in a very atypical employment relationship compared with the prime age group. Women are more at risk of falling into the category of very atypical workers than their male counterparts, particularly in the prime and older age group.

Workers in very atypical forms of work tend to have a lower educational level and are more prevalent in unskilled occupations and among agricultural and fishery workers. Such employment contracts are commonly found in economic sectors characterised by a strong seasonality and precariousness – primarily agriculture, hotels and restaurants, and construction. This may also partly explain the overrepresentation of very atypical workers in the lower income group.

However, the analysis has shown that a higher occupational level does not necessarily offer a shelter from more unstable and insecure employment. A relatively high proportion of senior managers and professionals are also found in the category of very atypical workers. An analysis may speculate on the nature of these jobs, workers’ motivations and the national context, which may favour a more extensive use of very atypical contracts or work arrangements. To cite an example, in Italy a survey carried out by the Centre for Social Studies and Policies (*Centro studi investimenti sociali*, Censis) shows that non-standard workers – that is, workers employed on fixed-term or part-time contracts, consultants and ‘semi-subordinate’ workers – tend to have a high educational level and are mainly technical, specialist and financial consultants (Papparella, 1999).

Working conditions of very atypical workers

The analysis of very atypical work and working conditions focuses on the four key dimensions of Eurofound’s analytical framework of quality of work and employment (Eurofound, 2002): career and employment security; training and skills development; health and well-being of workers; and work–life balance. In this analysis, only the most relevant variables will be examined. Occasionally, the ‘other’ category – including apprentices, others, refusals and don’t know answers to Q3b of the fourth EWCS ‘What kind of employment contract do you have?’ – is dropped from the analysis because of the small sample size.

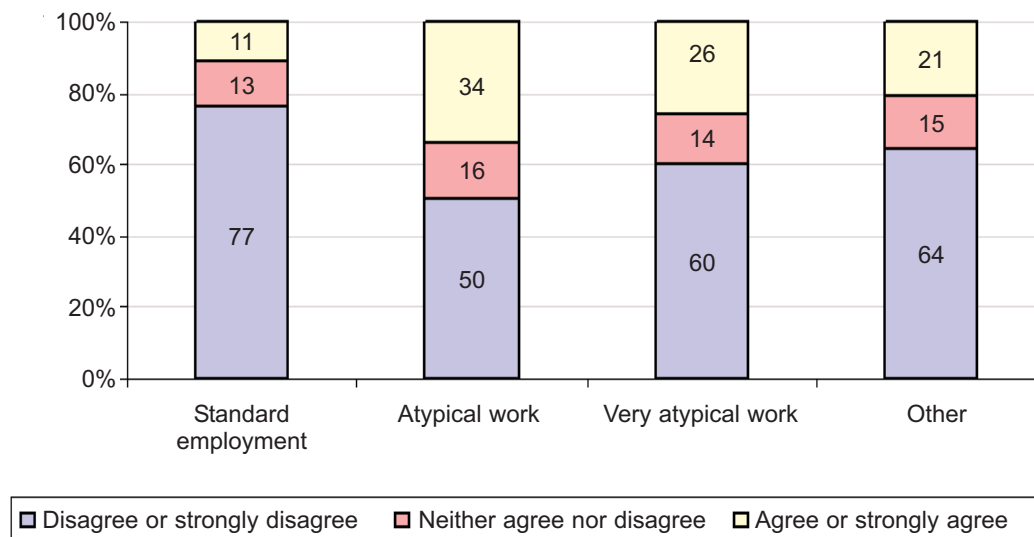
Career and employment security

This section does not cover issues already examined in the previous chapter, such as characteristics of employment and income earned. It mainly explores subjective job insecurity, career prospects and job satisfaction across the four main work categories: standard employment, atypical work, very atypical work and other, including apprenticeships, other non-specified contracts, refusals to answer and don’t knows.

Subjective job insecurity was measured in the fourth EWCS by asking workers whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement ‘I might lose my job in the next six months’ (Q37a), thus capturing feelings of insecurity among workers.

Surprisingly, Figure 16 reveals that a higher proportion of workers in more conventional non-standard employment (34%) agrees and strongly agrees with this statement, compared with very atypical workers (26%). It is also interesting to note the comparatively high proportion of very atypical workers (60%) who think positively about their job security. The majority of respondents in permanent employment are optimistic about their job security; only 11% considered it likely that they would lose their job over the next six months.

Figure 16: ‘I might lose my job in the next six months’, EU27 (%)



Notes: Standard employment means having an indefinite full-time employment contract. Atypical work refers to temporary agency work or fixed-term employment contracts lasting longer than six months. Very atypical work means having no contract, very short working hours of less than 10 hours a week, or a fixed-term or temporary agency work contract of up to six months. ‘Other’ includes apprenticeships, other non-specified contracts, refusals to answer and don’t knows.

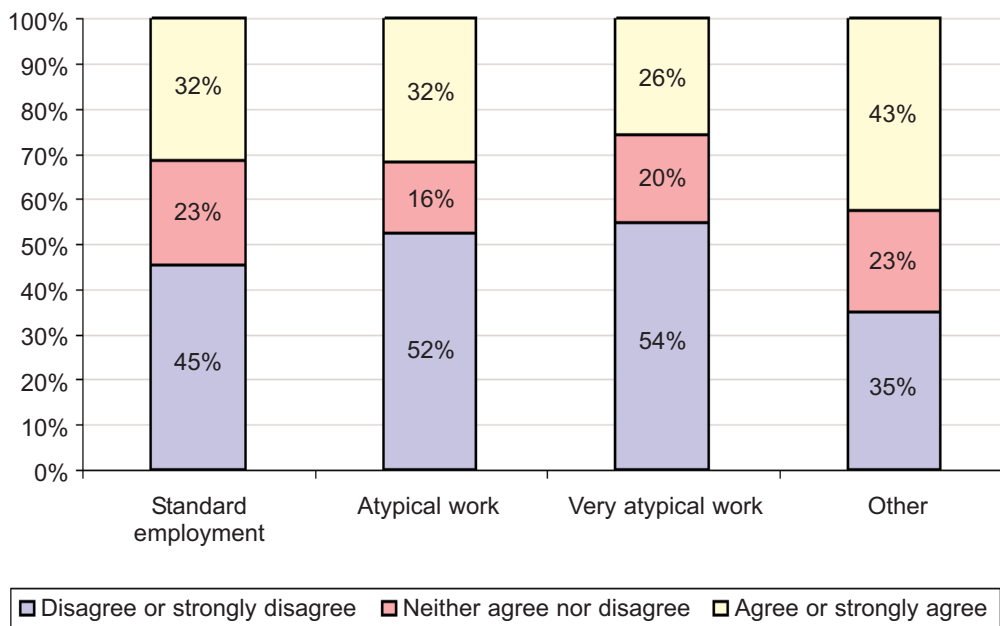
Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

Qualitative post-test analysis of the fourth EWCS revealed that this question may generate interpretation problems. In some countries, answers may be affected by recent changes in society, notably the transition to a market economy in most of the NMS, resulting in a higher response rate for this question (Sutela and Lehto, 2007). Nevertheless, recent secondary analysis of survey data on employment security and employability (Pacelli et al, 2008) found that this indicator is indeed reliable by testing it against Eurobarometer data.¹⁰ The secondary analysis shows that feelings of job insecurity are positively correlated with objective job insecurity¹¹ and vulnerability¹².

The fourth EWCS also asked respondents whether they felt that their job offered good prospects for career advancement (Figure 17). More than half of atypical and very atypical workers disagree or strongly disagree with the statement ‘My job offers good prospects for career advancement’ (Q37c). Only 26% of very atypical workers agree or strongly agree with this statement. Here, the issue is whether the use of these employment contracts or work arrangements is an entry port into more stable employment, or whether they are ‘traps’ involving an increasing precariousness of work – especially considering that many of these workers are in the youngest age group.

Of all the workers, the most optimistic about their career prospects are apprentices, workers on other non-specified contracts and those who do not indicate the type of contract that they have. Especially apprentices, who are often young workers at an early stage of their working life, would be expected to be more confident that their career prospects would improve.

Figure 17: ‘My job offers good possibilities for career advancement’, EU27 (%)



Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

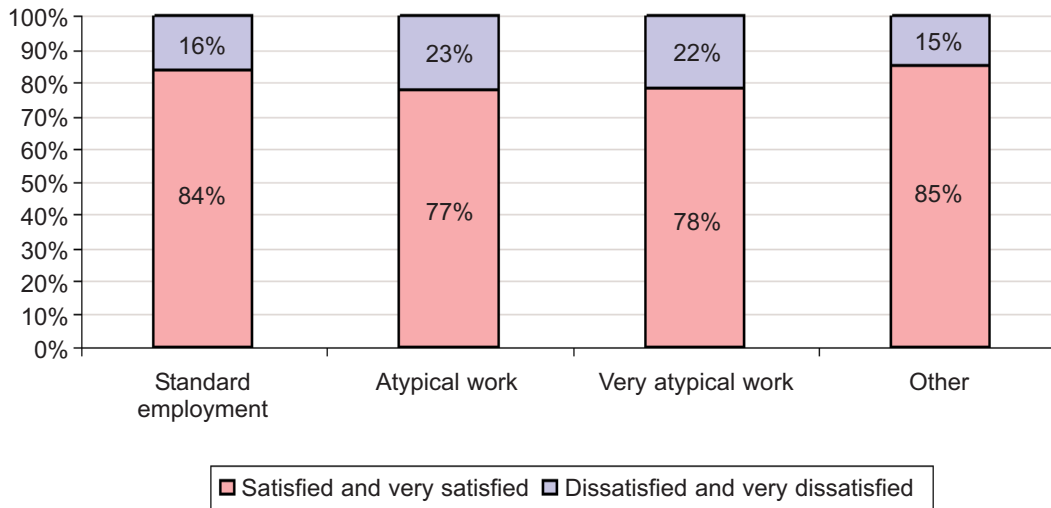
¹⁰ Answers to the Eurobarometer survey question QC7: ‘How confident would you say you are in your ability to keep your job in the coming months?’

¹¹ Objective job insecurity is a composite indicator which takes into account the type of employment contract, job tenure, working in the public or private sector and working in a small or large organisation.

¹² Vulnerability relates to the household structure (the presence of disabled, unemployed or dependent children in the household as well as the number of wage earners) and working under a non-permanent employment contract. These elements are then weighted by country-specific measures of social protection, that is, the institutional safety net available to the individual in need.

With regard to job satisfaction, workers in standard employment are more satisfied with their working conditions than atypical and very atypical workers (Figure 18). No major differences emerge in the reported levels of job satisfaction or dissatisfaction between the two groups of non-standard workers. Indeed, figures for overall satisfaction with working conditions are high across all categories of workers – standard, atypical and very atypical. This may be due to the fact that workers tend to give positive responses when questioned about their overall job satisfaction.

Figure 18: Job satisfaction, by form of work, EU27 (%)



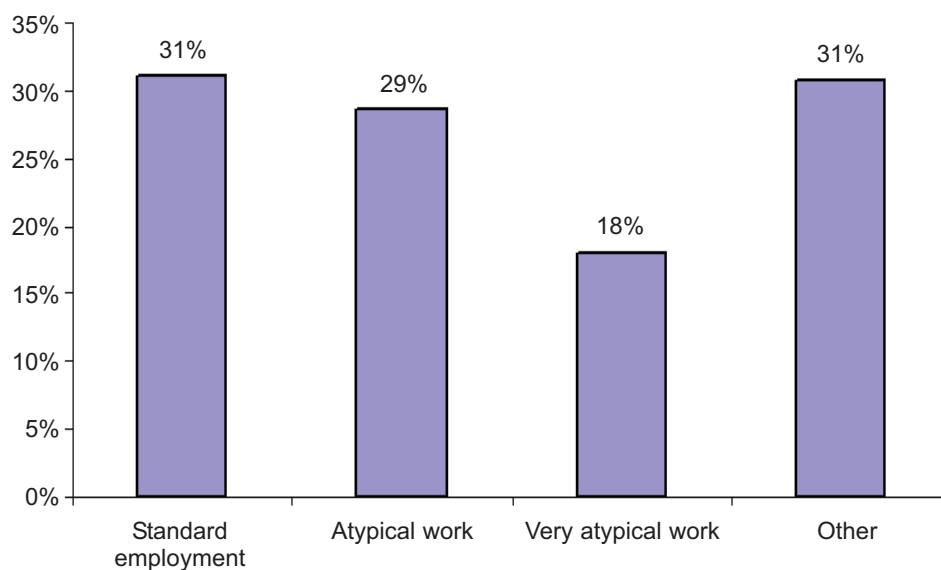
Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

Training and skills development

Being in a position to avail of training and learning opportunities in a job enhances the worker’s general employability. Jobs that involve adequate training, allowing the upgrading of qualifications and skills, can shelter workers – especially the most vulnerable individuals – from employment insecurity. However, findings from the fourth EWCS show a different reality. According to the survey data, training levels are generally low in Europe (Parent-Thirion et al, 2007): in 2005, fewer than 30% of EU employees received training paid for or provided by their employer.

With regard to employment status, the opportunities for very atypical workers to participate in training are inferior to those for employees in other categories. Only 18.1% of very atypical workers received training provided or paid by their employer in the previous 12 months, compared with 31.1% of workers in permanent employment and 28.7% of atypical workers on temporary contracts lasting more than six months (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Training provided or paid by employer in previous 12 months, by form of work, EU27 (%)



Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

The divide between standard and non-standard workers (both atypical and very atypical) is also apparent when looking at cognitive demands (Table 2). A higher proportion of non-standard workers reports carrying out monotonous work tasks. Very atypical workers are also more likely to state that their job does not involve learning new things, complex tasks and solving unforeseen problems on their own, compared with the average for standard workers and, to a lesser extent, other atypical workers. It should be emphasised that this low level of cognitive demands may stem from the higher concentration of very atypical workers in low-skilled occupations and sectors such as agriculture and hotels and restaurants.

Table 2: Cognitive demands, by form of work, EU27 (%)

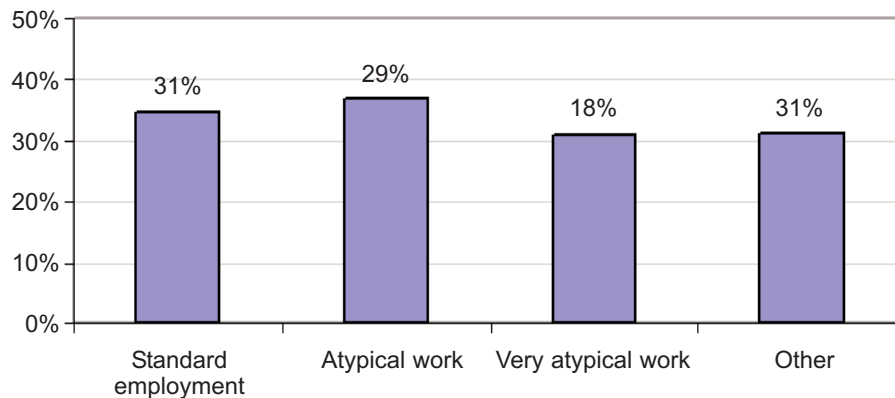
		Standard employment (indefinite, full-time)	Non-standard employment		Other (apprenticeship, other, DK/refusal)
			Atypical work (TAW or fixed-term > 6 months)	Very atypical work (no contract, < 10 hours a week, TAW/fixed-term <= 6 months)	
Solving unforeseen problems on own	No	18.0	25.5	28.5	29.1
	Yes	82.0	74.5	71.5	70.9
Monotonous tasks	No	58.4	46.4	48.9	52.1
	Yes	41.6	53.6	51.1	47.9
Complex tasks	No	36.4	43.8	55.4	46.5
	Yes	63.6	56.3	44.6	53.5
Learning new things	No	28.8	32.2	40.4	27.3
	Yes	71.2	67.8	59.6	72.7

Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

Health and well-being of workers

People in very atypical employment relationships are less likely to report work-related health problems than other workers (Figure 20).¹³ Interestingly, more conventional non-standard workers – holding a temporary employment contract for more than six months – report the highest levels of work-related health impact (37%). The comparatively lower proportion of very atypical workers reporting negative health outcomes (31%) may be explained by the fact that these employment contracts entail short tenure in a particular post or job, which reduces exposure and perceived health risks. Health problems, however, may develop at a later stage when the employment contract has come to an end.

Figure 20: *Perceived impact of work on health, by form of work, EU27 (%)*



Source: *Fourth EWCS, 2005*

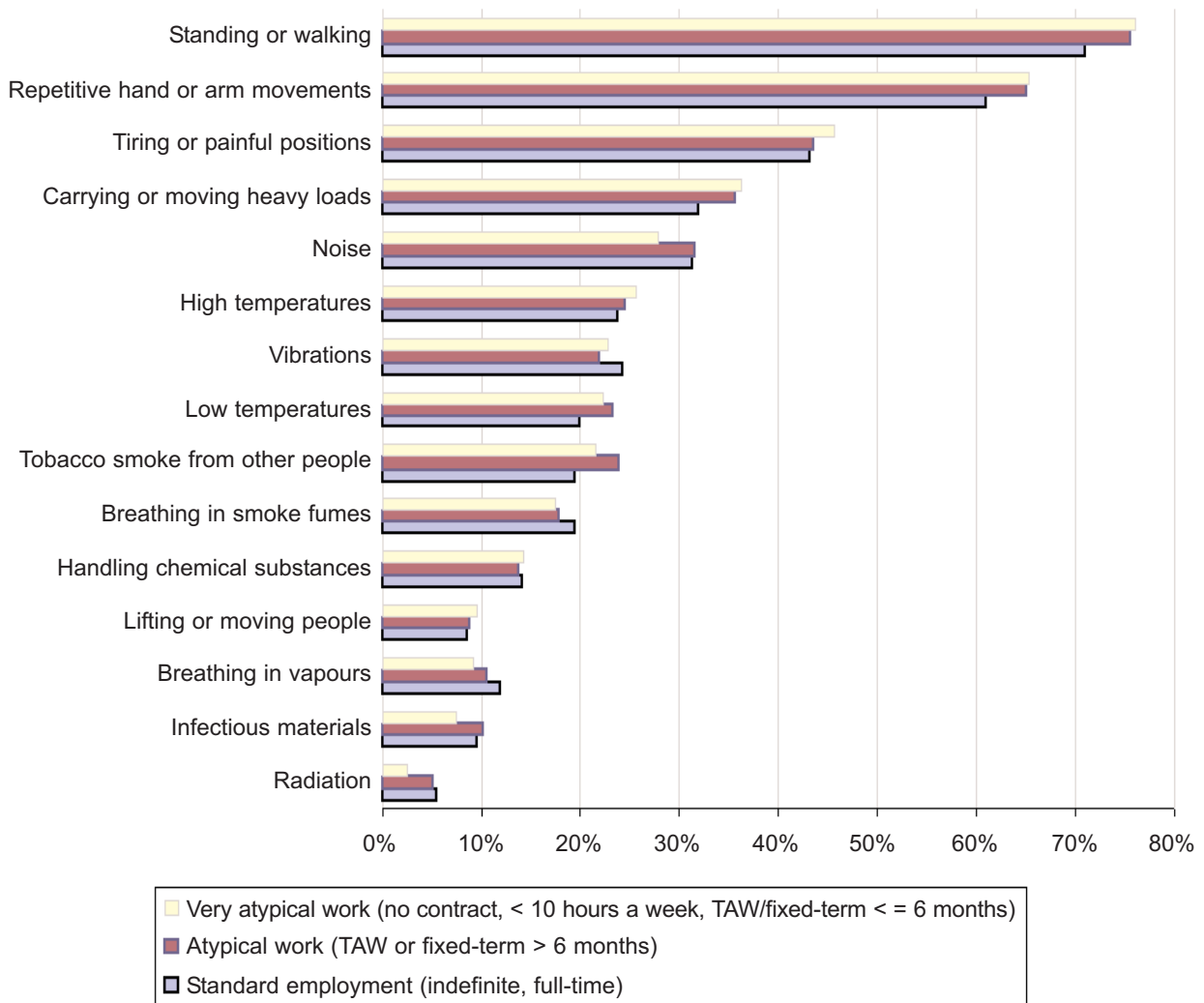
In terms of exposure to physical risk factors, very atypical workers (and also atypical workers) are significantly more exposed than workers in standard employment to some ergonomic risks for an extended period of time, such as standing and walking, repetitive hand or arm movement and, to a lesser extent, tiring or painful positions. These risks can predispose workers to musculoskeletal disorders in particular.

More specifically, about the same proportion of atypical and very atypical workers (76%) stand or walk for at least a quarter of their working time, while 71% of standard workers report doing so (Figure 21). The high exposure to this specific physical risk among non-standard workers (both atypical and very atypical) may be due to a sector effect; for example, non-standard employment is common in the hotels and restaurants sector.

Similarly, 65% of both very atypical and atypical workers state that their work involves repetitive hand or arm movements for at least a quarter of the time, compared with 61% of standard workers. More variations between the three categories of workers are found in relation to exposure to tiring and painful positions. Very atypical workers are more exposed to tiring and painful positions (46%) than their counterparts in standard employment (43%) or on temporary employment contracts of a duration of more than six months (44%). This may be partly due to the predominance of very atypical employment contracts or work arrangements in physically demanding sectors such as agriculture.

¹³ Respondents were asked 'Does your work affect your health?'

Figure 21: Exposure to physical risks, by forms of work, EU27 (%)



Notes: Exposure is measured as at least a quarter of the working time. The ‘Other’ category, including apprenticeships, other non-specified contracts, don’t knows and refusals to answer, is omitted from the analysis due to the small sample.
 Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

Despite the comparatively higher exposure of very atypical workers to the above ergonomic risk factors, these workers tend to report lower levels of physical and psychological health problems than workers in standard employment and, to some extent, other non-standard workers (Table 3). However, for some health outcomes – most notably injury – no difference arises in the level of reporting across the three categories of workers.

This low level of reported ill-health among very atypical workers may be explained by the limited temporal exposure to risk factors in jobs which entail short periods of work, for example working less than 10 hours a week or on an employment contract of six months or less.

Table 3: Health outcomes, by forms of work, EU27 (%)

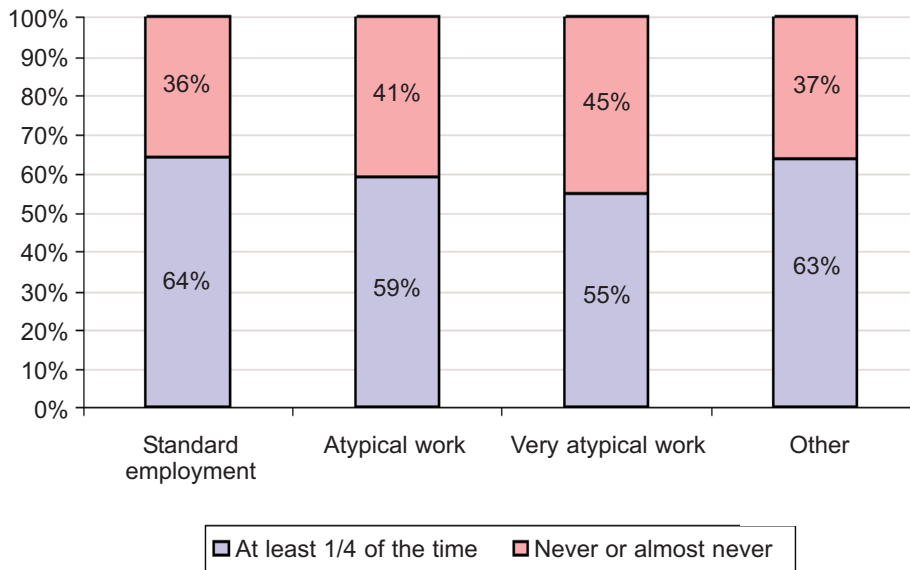
	Standard employment (indefinite, full-time)	Atypical work (TAW or fixed-term > 6 months)	Very atypical work (no contract, < 10 hours a week, TAW/fixed-term <= 6 months)
Hearing problems	8	7	5
Eyesight problems	8	8	5
Skin problems	6	8	6
Backache	24	25	22
Headaches	16	15	10
Stomach pain	6	5	4
Muscular pain	21	24	21
Breathing difficulties	5	4	4
Heart trouble	2	2	1
Injury	9	9	9
Stress	23	22	17
Fatigue	21	23	18
Sleeping problems	9	7	6
Allergies	4	5	3
Anxiety	8	6	5
Irritability	11	8	7

Note: The 'Other' category, including apprenticeships, other non-specified contracts, don't knows and refusals to answer, is omitted from the analysis due to the small sample.

Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

As indicated by the recent research conducted by the EU OSHA Risk Observatory (2007), work intensity is one of the new emerging risks which may affect workers' health and safety. However, according to the analysis of the fourth EWCS data, very atypical workers are less likely to be exposed to increasing work pressure. For example, 55% of very atypical workers report working to tight deadlines at least a quarter of the time, compared with 64% of standard workers and 59% of atypical workers (Figure 22).

Figure 22: Working to tight deadlines, by form of work, EU27 (%)



Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

Job control – measured as the ability to choose or change the order of tasks, the methods of work and the speed or rate of work – is rather limited among very atypical workers, compared with their counterparts in standard employment (Table 4). Atypical and very atypical workers have a similar level of job control, especially with regard to their ability to choose or change the order of tasks. However, atypical workers have more freedom to exercise control over the methods of work than workers in very atypical forms of work.

Table 4: Job autonomy, by form of work, EU27 (%)

	Standard employment (indefinite, full-time)	Non-standard employment		Other (apprenticeship, other, DK/refusal)
		Atypical work (TAW or fixed-term > 6 months)	Very atypical work (no contract, < 10 hours a week, TAW/fixed-term <= 6 months)	
Able to choose or change order of tasks	61.3	49.9	51.5	49.9
Able to choose or change methods of work	65.5	57.0	53.3	58.6
Able to choose or change speed or rate of work	66.9	61.6	58.9	60.8

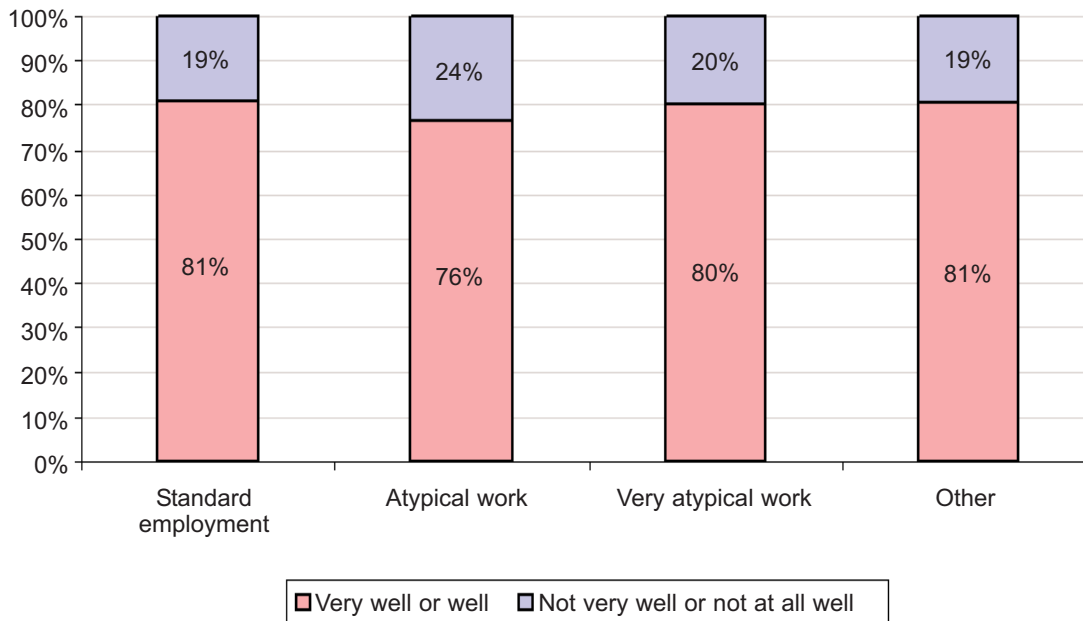
Source: Fourth EWCS, 2005

Work–life balance

Reported levels of satisfaction with work–life balance are rather high. As with the general question on job satisfaction, the question on satisfaction about work–life balance tends to generate high levels of affirmative answers.

With regard to employment status, an almost equal proportion of workers in very atypical and standard employment are satisfied with their work–life balance (80% and 81% respectively), while a lower level of satisfaction is reported by atypical workers on temporary employments contracts lasting more than six months (Figure 23).

Figure 23: Perception of work–life balance, by form of work, EU27 (%)



Source: *Fourth EWCS, 2005*

One explanation for the high rates of satisfaction with work–life balance reported by very atypical workers is that this category includes all persons working less than 10 hours a week. Time-wise, working very short hours makes it easier to balance work commitments with family responsibilities. However, it is unclear whether such work arrangements are the result of a voluntary choice or not, and whether they generate an adequate income for the job holder.

Conclusions

Drawing on data from the fourth EWCS, this analysis has investigated the incidence of very atypical work and explored the consequences for working conditions. In this paper, the definition of very atypical forms of work includes very short employment contracts of six months or less, very short working hours of less than 10 hours a week and non-written employment contracts. The paper is intended to complement and provide a background to the findings from the comparative analysis carried out by Eurofound on the same topic (Broughton et al, 2010).

Although comparisons are made systematically between standard, atypical and very atypical forms of work, the emphasis is on the category of very atypical workers. It is important to note that this category of workers is a very diversified group as it brings together workers in various employment relationships departing from standard full-time and permanent employment and with possibly different motivations for being in such employment relations.

Despite the limitations of the fourth EWCS questionnaire and data in relation to very atypical work, this initial exploratory analysis has outlined the following findings.

- Very atypical work is most prevalent among the youngest (19 to 29 years) and the oldest (50+ years) workers. Generally, women are more likely to be in a ‘very’ non-standard employment relationship than their male counterparts.
- A lower educational level is associated with very atypical work, which is also more prevalent in low-skilled occupations. This suggests that very atypical workers with low qualifications and in unskilled occupations have less chance of getting stable and secure employment. Nonetheless, high educational and occupational levels do not offer full protection against employment insecurity and instability.

- From a sector perspective, the highest proportion of very atypical workers is found in the agricultural, hotels and restaurants, and construction sectors, which are generally characterised by seasonal peak and off-peak periods. Other sectors with a significant proportion of very atypical workers are wholesale and retail trade, and real estate.
- In terms of country distribution, large variations arise between Member States, with higher than average proportions of workers in very atypical employment in Cyprus, Malta, Ireland, Greece and the UK. This may be due to the high incidence of workers reporting having no employment contract in some countries.
- Despite the comparatively higher exposure to some ergonomic risks, very atypical workers report low levels of ill-health. They also report lower levels of cognitive demands, job control and work intensity – especially compared with workers in standard employment.
- Very atypical workers receive less training provided or paid by the employer and they report more limited career prospects and lower income compared with other categories of workers, thus leading to a more precarious employment profile.

These results, however, must be accompanied by a note of caution; the analysis carried out in this paper is exploratory in nature. As has been noted elsewhere, the limited scope of the fourth EWCS in relation to forms of employment does not allow an analysis either to gauge reliably the actual incidence of very atypical forms of work in Europe or to assess the level of precariousness associated with such employment relationships. This paper has used a bivariate approach; however, a multivariate approach should be followed in order to explore the subject in more depth, to disentangle the various determinants of falling into the category of very atypical work – controlling for age, gender, educational attainment, sector and occupation – and to examine the implications in terms of working conditions outcomes. This would be the obvious next stage in the analysis.

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Annex: Country groups and 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)

NMS 12 New Member States, 10 of which joined the EU in 2004 – sometimes referred to as the NMS10 (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	Country code	Country name	Country code	Country name
AT	Austria	ES	Spain	MT	Malta
BE	Belgium	FI	Finland	NL	Netherlands
BG	Bulgaria	FR	France	PL	Poland
CY	Cyprus	HU	Hungary	PT	Portugal
CZ	Czech Republic	IE	Ireland	RO	Romania
DE	Germany	IT	Italy	SE	Sweden
DK	Denmark	LT	Lithuania	SI	Slovenia
EE	Estonia	LU	Luxembourg	SK	Slovakia
EL	Greece	LV	Latvia	UK	United Kingdom

Sara Riso, Eurofound

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