Working conditions

**Workers in Europe in good health, but emotional demands take their toll**

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Topic:

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**People at work in Europe report good health and well-being, and increased control over their work activities. However, Eurofound data shows that work is also becoming more emotionally demanding, which poses a risk to health, as well as the long-term sustainability of work itself.**

Eurofound’s new report on *Working conditions and workers' health* shows that the nature of work is changing, and the factors that determine health and well-being at work are also changing. The findings of the research point beyond a ‘traditional’, narrow framework of occupational safety and health; highlighting the importance of including psychosocial risks, such as emotional demands, into the equation, along with engagement at work. Health and well-being may be stable, but Europe needs to safeguard and promote world-class work environments if it is to improve the overall sustainability of work and meet head-on the demographic challenges that are on the horizon.

The report emphasises that unskilled jobs carry the highest health risks because they are exposed to higher than average demands such as physical risks, work intensity and long hours. Workers in unskilled jobs report poorer access to resources such as support from supervisors and colleagues and ‘rewards’ such as fair pay, job security and good career prospects. Workers reporting job insecurity, or who are in non-permanent contracts, also report more demands and fewer work resources while displaying less engagement, more exhaustion, poorer well-being and worse performance on health indicators.

Control over different aspects of work, such as order of tasks and speed is increasing ­— which is an important part of workers’ resources at work. However, emotionally demanding tasks, which could involve dealing with angry clients, or being exposed to emotionally disturbing situations at work, is also increasing. This may have significant implications for the future because of the need to retain workers in the labour market for longer, as Europe’s population continues to age.

Demographic change is becoming a pivotal issue in labour market and economic policy, resulting in a growing demand for services from a health sector already characterised by high emotional demand, stress and work intensity. Women, who are more likely to work in sectors such as health or education, are particularly exposed to the psychosocial risks associated with these emotionally demanding jobs.

The report also emphasises the importance of motivation for health and well-being at work: job control, social resources and rewarding working experiences contribute to more engagement which in turn has positive effects on health and well-being. It calls for policy initiatives that go beyond protecting workers from excessive work demands to promoting complementary strategic investments that provide workers with the necessary resources to maintain and improve their own health and well-being. These initiatives should complement, and not replace, the redesign of work to limit work demands.